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CARRY ON

BY

"TAFFRAIL"

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CARRY ON!

NAVAL SKETCHES AND STORIES

By "TAFFRAIL", pseud. of
Henry Taprell Dorling.

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PREFACE

Most of the sketches and stories in this book have appeared in print before. Many of them were written before the present hostilities commenced, but as they may give some idea of the Navy in its pre-war days, they remain as they were first written.

"The Mine-Sweepers," "The Bad Hat," "The Decoy," and "An Eye for an Eye," first saw the light of day in *Chambers' Journal*; "The Snotties," "The Destroyers," and "A Sunday Afternoon" in *Pearson's Magazine*; and "Hoisting the Pendant" and "Coal Ship" in the *Weekly Scotsman*. The greater number of the remainder appeared in *Answers*. I am indebted to the Editors of these publications for permission to reprint my contributions to their pages.

1916. TAFFRAIL.

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TO MY
SHIPMATES

J. A.
E. W. B.
B. C.
J. J. E.
A. G. L.-B.
AND R. D. O.

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CARRY ON!

HOISTING THE PENDANT

THE small grey cruiser lying in her dock looks strangely forlorn and desolate. Her once trim paint is weather-beaten and dingy; her guns are shrouded in their painted canvas covers, while her deck is soiled with the dockyard mud and dirt brought on board by the feet of many workmen. It is so unutterably grimy that it is hard to realise one is standing upon wooden planking. The ship flies no Union Jack and White Ensign at bow and stern; there is no pendant at her masthead, and save for a few dockyard "maties" (workmen) the decks are quite deserted.

Poor, neglected little ship! For fourteen months she has lain out of commission in the dockyard with hardly a soul on board her, and with the clanging of steel upon steel, and the "rat-tat-tat" of the compressed air drills and riveters making the day and night hideous all around her. Uncouth-looking men, armed with strange tools, have trampled the grime into her sacred quarter-deck. They have explored her innermost compartments; have hammered her this way and that, and have driven red-hot rivets into her long-suffering hull, until she feels thoroughly ashamed of herself. She feels forlorn and forsaken; her sisters have come into the dockyard for their annual refits and have gone away again, gone to the place where all good ships long to go, the open sea. She has looked at them with envy, longing for the time when brawny seamen should

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scrub her planking snow-white, and polish her brasswork and guns until they shone in the sunlight. But for fourteen months she has waited in vain, and now she has almost given up hope, and has come to the conclusion that she is doomed to lie in this dockyard for ever.

But her time comes at last, for one day a harassed-looking lieutenant comes on board, and, armed with a note-book, commences a long tour of investigation. He wanders round the deserted mess decks, jotting down figures as he goes. He visits every compartment from stem to stern, seeking the information he requires. Later on in the day, when a van piled up with luggage arrives on the dock side, and two weary-looking vanmen stagger on board with a succession of trunks, packing-cases, and wooden boxes, all marked with the officer's name in staring white letters, the little ship can hardly restrain a quiver of joy. She is about to be commissioned!

For nearly a week the lieutenant is hard at work. The ship, a light cruiser, is not large enough to carry a commander as second in command, and the officer who arrived with such quantities of baggage has been appointed as her first lieutenant. As such he is the senior executive officer in the ship next to the captain, and is responsible to his senior for the cleanliness, internal economy, and general organisation and efficiency of the vessel and her crew. He is the intermediary, moreover, between the captain and the officers and men; nothing goes on in the ship without his knowing it, and he receives half-a-crown a day extra pay for his labours.

But now that the ship is about to commission, he has plenty to do. He has already been provided with a list of the men detailed to form the

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crew, and all sorts and styles of men there are. Petty officers, able seamen, ordinary seamen, and boys; engine-room artificers, stoker petty officers, stokers; marines, blacksmiths, plumbers, painters, carpenters, shipwrights, armourers, and a host of other folk, all of whom are necessary for the efficiency of a man-of-war, however small she may be.

The officer starts by filling in their names in his "watch bill," and then proceeds to allot men to the guns, and crews to the various small boats carried by the ship. He then decides how many men shall sit at each mess-table, and where they shall sling their hammocks and stow their kit-bags. It is rather trying work, for on more occasions than one he finds he has detailed the same man for two different jobs.

He next proceeds to tell off the ship's company for the places they will fill, in the event of going into action, a fire occurring on board, or in the event of a collision with another ship, while arrangements also have to be made for letting the men know what is expected of them when anchoring, entering or leaving harbour, or taking another ship in tow. But at last he has completed this part of the work, and devotes his attention to making out the "commissioning cards." These small oblong bits of pasteboard are presented to each man on joining, and form a convenient method in which to inform the newly-arrived crew whereabout they are to stow their belongings, what mess they belong to, and what guns and boats they are to man. At last everything is ready, and now all the lieutenant has to do is to await the arrival of his men with what patience he can muster.

The commissioning morning arrives, and at about 8.30 a.m. a long procession of petty officers

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and men are seen wending their way through the dockyard towards the ship, whose crew they will presently form. They represent all branches of the service, and, moving rapidly along, drag behind them as they come carts filled to overflowing with chests, bags, and hammocks.

Before long they have halted on the dock side, below which the cruiser is lying, and are eyeing their future home critically, passing remarks one to the other. Will she be a good ship in bad weather, or will she be like a half-tide rock with water coming on board everywhere? What sort of accommodation does she offer for her crew? These, and a hundred and one other questions are bandied to and fro, but presently the first lieutenant appears with the master-at-arms, and the work of distributing the commissioning cards begins.

Having received their bits of pasteboard, the men file on board one by one, carrying their bags and hammocks, and after stowing them, sit down in their places on the mess decks. By the time half the cards have been served out nine o'clock has arrived, and as the neighbouring vessels strike their bells, the White Ensign, Union Jack, and pendant appear at the ensign staff, jackstaff, and masthead of the newly-commissioned ship. The moment has arrived at last, and the vessel feels she is a man-of-war again.

The captain, who arrived on board some time ago, dons his frock-coat and sword, and goes off to report his ship commissioned to the Commander-in-Chief of the port, and all through the morning the work of embarking the effects of the crew goes on. The cooks have already lit the fires in the galley, and provisions have been served out, and at noon the men sit down to their first meal on board. During the afternoon

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they are exercised at "fire quarters," "collision quarters," and "general quarters" (stations for action), the three most important contingencies to be provided for, and by nightfall the same day everybody is beginning to settle down in his new surroundings.

During the next week the ship is taken out of dock into the harbour, and her crew are busily employed in filling the bunkers with coal, and in embarking stores and ammunition. The work of getting the ship clean, however, is not neglected, and in a week the cruiser is ready for sea. Her men are beginning to work in unison, and the first lieutenant and officer responsible for the cleanliness of the mess decks heave sighs of relief when they see the dirt vanishing from the decks and paintwork.

In another three days, resplendent in a coat of new grey paint, the ship sails to join her squadron. The long-neglected decks have been scrubbed to a snowy whiteness; guns and brasswork have been polished until they shimmer in the sun, and at last the crew are able to feel that they belong to one of His Majesty's men-of-war, not to a dirty, neglected hulk.

The ship's company has been drawn from all the corners of the earth. Some have just come home from the sun-baked shores of the Persian Gulf, or from river gunboats up the Yang-tse-kiang. Others have just completed a commission in the West Indies; in a destroyer in the Mediterranean, or in one of the ships of the Home Fleet. But, though few of them have been shipmates before, new friendships are being made daily, and everyone is beginning to take an interest in, and to learn something of, the former history of everybody else.

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Before long they are "pulling together," in absolute harmony. They begin to regard "our ship" as the only one in the whole Navy worth thinking about, and though, of course, their opinions on the subject may be somewhat prejudiced in their own favour, they are firmly convinced that their own little vessel is by far the smartest in the whole British Fleet.

Perhaps they are right, for every officer and man on board is doing his best to achieve this one object. It is this spirit, the spirit of friendly rivalry, which animates the crew of every British man-of-war, and plays no small part in maintaining the efficiency of our Navy.

EMBARKING AMMUNITION

RED-SAILED barges are on their way down the muddy river. Their tanned canvas is bellying out in the fresh breeze, and, with their bluff bows breasting the dingy, mud-coloured water, they are utilising the last hours of the ebb tide to help them on their way towards their destination. They are each worked by only two men, one of whom is at the wheel aft, while the other has his hands full in tending the brails and sheets of the heavy mainsail and foresail as the vessel tacks to and fro across the narrow river. All are deeply laden, for the water laps over the gunwales, but the masterly manner in which they are handled evokes the admiration of seamen.

Their names are commonplace and innocent enough—one is called the *Gertie*, another the *Infant*—but on board each one of them there are enough explosives to send a whole fleet of Dreadnoughts to the bottom. They are the barges

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chartered by the Government to convey ammunition from the depôt up the river to a battleship at the anchorage far below, and each one of them flies at her mizzen the scarlet, crown-emblazoned flag denoting her occupation.

They drop down the river with a favourable wind and tide, and the same evening finds them anchored alongside the battleship to which they will presently transfer their dangerous cargoes. The huge grey man-of-war has three of them secured on either side of her, but the work of embarking the ammunition will not commence until daylight the next morning.

Next day the bluejackets of the man-of-war are astir early, and at 5.45 a.m., with the first gleams of daylight, the work commences. The derricks, with their blocks and wire whips, have been rigged and placed overnight, and while parties of seamen are taking the ends of the wires to the winches which will hoist the heavy projectiles on board, others are uncovering the large hatchways leading to the holds of the barges.

On the coverings being removed the *Infant* is seen to be full of shells for the 12-inch guns, the *Gertie* carries case after case of cordite cartridges; while others are full to the hatches with shells for the small quick-firing weapons, detonators in their steel red-painted boxes, cases containing the guncotton-filled warheads for the torpedoes, and, last but not least, the rifle and pistol ammunition.

Before very long the winches have started work, and the men in the holds are having a busy time in getting the great 12-inch projectiles ready for hoisting in. They weigh 850 lbs. each, or three of them turn the scale at a little over the ton, so they have to be slung singly. Still they are whipped up fast enough, and as each one

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arrives on deck with a thud, it is seized upon and rolled aside to make room for the next.

The high explosive lyddite shells, with their yellow bodies and red band, are handled as if they contained dough instead of enough powerful explosive to drive a hole in the side of the ship, but at present they are unfused and innoxious, so are treated with scant courtesy. The pointed "common shell," painted black with a red-and-white band near the tip, and the capped armour piercers, designed to tear their way through and to explode inside the enemy's armour-plated sides, are already fitted with their fuses, but as they require a blow of many tons to set the latter in action, there is no danger in the handling of them. The practice projectiles are of the same weight as the shells, but contain no explosive, while they are marked with a white tip and a yellow encircling band. It is surprising to see the way the great shells are whipped in and handled, and while one party of men is busy getting them on board, another group are moving them below to the shell rooms.

In another place the cordite charges for the 12-inch guns are being got in. They are stowed in long metal cylinders painted drab, which are covered all over with stencil marks of many colours, denoting the age, place of manufacture, size, and exact weight of the contents. As they come on board they are piled in heaps, and from there the men, with trucks, take them to the hatches leading to the magazines below. The cartridges and shells for the 12-pounder guns are being embarked further aft, while over the other side of the ship a party of men are getting in the warheads for the torpedoes, and cases of gun-cotton, with as much nonchalance as if they were

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handling sacks of potatoes. By seven o'clock in the evening it is getting dark, and the operation is concluded for the time being.

Over 600 tons weight of ammunition have to be taken in altogether, so an early start is made the following morning, and by noon some of the barges are empty and have left. Others are not cleared until the early evening. Several hours later all the ammunition on deck has been stowed in the respective shell rooms and magazines, and with a sigh of relief—for handling many tons of ammunition is no child's-play—the weary men seek their hammocks. The barges, meanwhile, are well on their way up the river towards their depôt at Upnor, and before long the *Infant* and *Gertie* may be sailing down the river again with another consignment of ammunition for one of His Majesty's ships.

If nothing particular is going on one of them may be sent up the Thames to Woolwich, to bring round a 12-inch gun weighing some fifty-odd tons, and worth, perhaps, £2,000. It may be mid-winter, when the gales will make navigating the Thames estuary a matter of great difficulty, if not of positive danger, but still the good old craft, manned by her skipper and one hand, will carry out her errand with despatch and in safety. They are by no means the least important of the world's workers.

THE MIDDLE WATCH

The corporal of Marines, his greatcoat covered with little beads of moisture, knocks loudly on the white-enamelled sliding door of the cabin before him.

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"Mr. Smith, sir," he says loudly, putting his head in through the curtain, "ten minutes to eight bells!"

The figure in the bunk under the porthole sits up with a grunt and rubs his eyes, and then, stretching out a hand, turns on the electric light and puts one bare leg over the edge of the bunk.

"What's the night like?" he inquires, with a yawn.

"Dirty, sir," the man answers. "Rainin' hard."

The lieutenant mutters something unparliamentary as he jumps to the floor and starts his toilet; but exactly five minutes afterwards, with a suit of warm clothing over his pyjamas, a sou'-wester crammed down over his eyes, and a pair of heavy leather sea-boots on his feet, he is struggling into his oilskin. Two minutes later he is climbing up the bridge ladder to keep the middle watch—midnight till 4 a.m.; and, after a brief visit to the charthouse, where he examines the printed sheet with the pencilled line showing the track of the fleet, he resumes his climb to the flying bridge, where the officer of the first watch anxiously awaits his arrival.

"Well, how goes it?" asks the new-comer.

"Pretty rotten!" answers the other. "It's been drizzling like this ever since ten o'clock. Well, the fleet's in divisions, line ahead. Course by compass, south seventy-three west. Ship's in station, two and a half cables astern of the *Bellerophon*. He looks through a small instrument as he speaks, and then hands it across to his relief. "Here you are," he remarks. "Plumb in station and dropping slowly."

The officer of the middle watch takes the sextant, rubs the moisture off the mirrors with his

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forefinger, and then squints through it at the next ship ahead, a bare 500 yards away. He notes that the upper speed light at her yardarm is reflected down until it is exactly in line with the light at the stern.

"Right-ho!" he exclaims. "She's all right. What's keeping her steady?"

"'Bout fourteen and a half knots drops her slightly," answers the other. "We're goin' that now."

"Right! Is there anything in sight?"

"There's Start Point on the starboard bow. There, she's flashing now!"—as a brilliant, white flash comes out of the darkness in the direction in which he is pointing. "There's a steamer on the port bow showing her red light," he continues, waving to the left, "and there are a couple of trawlers' lights away on the starboard beam. The sounding machine's going every ten minutes, and the skipper wants to be called if we alter course, if you're in doubt, and at daylight. That's the lot."

"Right!" mutters the other officer again. "Good-night!"

"Good-night!"

The sleepy lieutenant clatters gratefully down the ladder, disappears into the charthouse for a second to sign the log, and then vanishes below. Ten minutes later he is fast asleep in his bunk, dreaming that no such thing as His Majesty's Navy ever existed.

The officer on the bridge, left alone, yawns and turns up the collar of his oilskin to prevent the drizzle running down his neck. He seems to take his responsibility very lightly, though he is temporarily in charge of a 19,000-ton battleship, costing close on two millions of his country's money, and carrying over 800 men. A short five

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hundred yards ahead, too, is the giant hulk of a sister-ship, while the same distance astern the great bow of a similar monster is silently driving its way through the water.

Though to a landsman the distance looks appallingly close, the knowledge does not seem to disturb the officer of the watch in the very least; but he keeps his weather-eye lifting, for he realises full well that the safety of the ship depends upon him, and on him alone.

A wrong order to the man at the wheel below on the bridge may result in a catastrophe and the utter ruin of his career, but years of training at an age when most of his brothers were still at school, have fitted him for the responsible position he now holds.

He takes another glance through the sextant at the dark blur of the next ship ahead, and notices at once that the reflection of the upper light has crept down until it is slightly below the glimmering stern light. This means that the ship is a trifle astern of her proper station; and half instinctively, without having to stop to think, he puts his mouth to the voice-pipe, and passes a muffled order to the bluejacket stationed at the engine-room telegraph on the bridge below. He listens for a moment until he hears the "ting, ting!" which shows the order has been transmitted to the engine-room deep down in the bowels of the ship. The great turbines increase their revolutions ever so slightly, and the battleship begins to draw ahead.

But the flagship has something important to say. A light starts flickering at her masthead, and in a few seconds answering twinkles from the other ships in the fleet show they are ready to take in the signal.

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"Alter course to south sixty west, sir. Leaders together, the rest in succession," reports an oil-skinned figure, running up the ladder.

"All right! Report it to the captain," orders the officer of the watch.

"Captain says will you carry on, sir?" says the man, a minute later, having been below to where the captain has been asleep in his cabin under the bridge.

*"Executive, sir," as a long white flash breaks out from the flagship's masthead light.

The lieutenant "carries on."

"Starboard twenty!" he orders, when the ship comes to the spot where her next ahead has turned.

The quartermaster repeats the orders as he twirls the wheel, and, as the ship begins to swing, the officer of the watch tries to keep one eye on the compass and the other on his next ahead.

But she is swinging too fast.

"Ease to ten!" comes the abrupt order.

"'Midships! Port ten!" in rapid succession.

"'Midships!" again. And the great ship has fallen into line dead in the wake of the ship ahead.

And so the watch goes on.

It is cold, trying work, for the drizzle is persistent and uncomfortable. At times, too, the loneliness seems almost unbearable; for here, seventy feet above the water, he is well above the bridge with its signalmen, look-out men, and men at the wheel and telegraphs.

But the time passes somehow, and at last comes the staccato sound of eight bells. The lieutenant heaves a sigh of satisfaction as his relief appears, and proceeds to "turn over."

* The "Executive" is the order for the purport of a signal to be carried out.

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Then, a few minutes later, when the first signs of dawn are appearing in the eastern sky, he is on his way to his cabin below.

In ten minutes, after a puff at a pipe, he is fast asleep.

The middle watch is over.

"COAL SHIP!"

THOUGH barely five o'clock, the first signs of daylight are already showing over the serrated edge of the dark purple hills to the eastward of the landlocked anchorage. As we watch, the blue veil of night slowly gives way to the rosy flush of dawn, and before long the hedges, trees, fields, and scattered grey-walled homesteads gradually come into view, as, with the advent of another day, the hills assume their customary colouring.

Lying motionless on the calm water, which has changed from blue to grey, and from grey to opalescent tints borrowed from the sky, are six great battleships moored in two ordered lines. Their sombre grey hulls are picked out with rows of electric lights showing from scuttles, but five o'clock has come, and as the tinkle of two bells floats across the water we hear the raucous shouts of the bos'un's mates rousing the sleepy bluejackets to another day's work.

On board one ship, however, alongside of which is secured a grimy collier, the men are already astir, and are standing on decks in groups, smoking their morning pipes. They have been turned out of their hammocks at half-past four, and before long they will be busy transferring the coal from the vessel alongside to the gaping bunkers of their own ship. The men bear little resemblance

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to the smart ship's company of a man-o'-war, for they are clad in their oldest garments, all of which exhibit the sable signs of previous coalings.

Before long the Commander, dressed in his most disreputable clothes, and distinguishable only by the three rows of discoloured lace on his sleeves, comes on deck smoking a cigarette. The bos'un's mate of the watch goes up to him and reports something in a whisper; he nods and throws the cigarette-end overboard, and soon we hear the shrill twittering of a pipe from forward. "'Ands fall in for coalin' ship!" bellows a stentorian voice. The groups of men scatter and run aft to the quarter-deck, while the officers, looking like a collection of coal-heavers, troop up the after hatches.

"All correct, sir," at length reports the chief bos'un's mate to the Commander.

"Coal ship!" orders the latter abruptly.

The men fall out and go to their respective stations. The seamen clamber into the holds of the collier and begin shovelling the coal into the two-hundredweight bags. Others, whose duty it is to unhook the bags as they are hoisted in ten at a time, go to the four "dumping grounds" on the battleship's deck, while the marines arm themselves with barrows ready to convey the bags to the bunker openings. At each orifice stand two men ready to tip the contents as they arrive, while down below in the bunkers the patient stokers are waiting for the black avalanche which will presently descend through the shoots.

A bugle suddenly blares out, and with a wheeze and a deafening clatter a steam winch revolves and the first hoist of coal appears in mid-air. The inhaul whip tautens and strains, and with a

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crash the ton of coal falls on deck. In an instant it is set upon by a party of men who cast the hook free, and in less than forty-five seconds the deck is clear and the ten bags are on the barrows, being whirled round the decks to the bunker openings. The first arrives at its destination and is seized by two carpenters' mates, doing duty as tippers. They empty its contents down the circular orifice. A cloud of black dust rises from the hole, and as the band strikes up the first notes of the latest music-hall song, the hoists begin to come in at four places at once. Soon the once white deck is half an inch deep in sable dust; the grey paint-work vanishes in a covering of black, and the men's faces, hands, and clothes are dyed the colour of jet with the all-pervading particles. By six o'clock the string of little signal flags at the yardarm announces that 180 tons have come in. It is good work, for the first hoist did not come in until twenty minutes past the hour; but still the average must be maintained if the record is to be beaten, and shovellers, barrow-men, tippers, and trimmers strive their very utmost.

During the next hour 195 tons are embarked, and as the result becomes known there are wild cheers from the men working in the collier. The bandsmen, too, as if to show that they are not mere idle spectators, play for all they are worth, though their strident efforts are all but drowned in the uproar and rumble of the winches and barrows.

At eight bells the work is stopped for half an hour to allow the men to get breakfast. The decks are soon deserted. Crowds of ravenous men tumble down the hatchways, while wardroom and mess-decks are invaded by hordes of black-

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faced demons clamouring for food. Some of the officers have washed their hands, and a few of the more fastidious have cleaned a circle of grime from about their mouths, but many are in too great hurry to do even this.

At half-past eight the work recommences, and an hour and a-half later only 145 tons remain to come in. Still the black-faced, tired men strive their utmost, but at last the bugle sounds the "Cease firing." The coaling is over, and there is cheering everywhere as the last hoist of empty bags and shovels appear in the air and descends on the battleship's deck.

The once clean ship is covered with a layer of grime until even the mess-decks and cabins are draped in funereal black. Still, what does it matter? The ship can easily be cleaned. What pleases her officers and men is that the Flagship has been beaten, for their own record works out at 197·25 tons an hour.

THE SIGNALMEN

High up on the upper bridge over the superstructure, close beside the single mast and the squat shape of the foremost funnel, and above the gun-turrets, with their 13·5-inch weapons, stand a knot of officers and men.

The captain is chatting with the navigating lieutenant. Close behind the former, with his telescope levelled on the distant flagship, is a short, burly, red-faced man, whose peaked cap and brass-buttoned coat, with the crossed signal flags on the collar, show he is the chief yeoman of signals.

The fleet is about to leave its anchorage, and

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down below the lower bridge seems very crowded. The captain's "doggie"—midshipman A.D.C.—is relating certain shore-going experiences to the midshipman of the watch in an amused whisper. In the background is a barefooted bluejacket boy, doing duty as a messenger.

The quartermaster and his helmsman are at the steering-wheel, and on either side are the bluejackets whose duty it is to operate the three engine-room telegraphs, which transmit the orders from the bridge to the engines below.

But the tale is not yet complete, for there are fully ten more men on the bridge, and all of them wear upon their right arm the badge of two crossed flags, which denotes their calling. They are the signalmen.

Some are little more than boys, but one, the eldest of the party, a bearded veteran with a telescope under his arm, wears the crossed anchors and good-conduct badges of a petty-officer. He is the yeoman of signals, the chief assistant and right-hand man of the chief yeoman himself.

Some of his underlings, the ordinary signalmen and signal-boys, are rolling back the canvas covers in front of the wooden flag lockers, while the others cast loose the halliards leading down from the masthead and yardarms above.

Before long the chief yeoman spots a little string of coloured bunting leave the flagship's deck and climb slowly to her masthead. She is fully two miles away, and the morning is so still that the flags are hanging straight up and down. But the man has eyes like a hawk; he has seen quite enough to know what the signal means, and before the bunting has blown clear he has made his report.

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"Shorten in to three shackles, sir!" he says.

The captain nods, while the chief yeoman goes to the rail to see if the "answering pennant" has been hoisted. A minute later the admiral's signal comes down with a flutter, and the capstan on the forecastle starts to heave in the cable.

Presently another string of coloured flags leaves the flagship's deck.

"Weigh anchor, sir!" says the chief yeoman, and then, as the capstan resumes its labours, goes to the rail and looks over at his subordinates below. "Stand by to repeat all signals," he remarks.

Before very long all the anchors in the fleet have appeared above the water.

"Turn together to east-north-east, sir!" says the chief yeoman, as once more the flagship covers herself in bunting.

Down below the men are falling over each other in their haste to repeat it, and within forty-five seconds of its first appearance a replica of the admiral's signal is flying over our masthead.

"Signal's down, sir!"—again, as the flags disappear in a curve.

"Half-ahead starboard! Half-astern port! Helm hard a' starboard!" orders the captain calmly, putting his lips to a voice-pipe.

The men on the bridge below move the handles of their telegraphs, the quartermaster twirls his wheel, and as the propellers start to revolve the great ship begins to turn on her heel.

"Form divisions in line ahead, disposed to port. Columns to be ten cables apart. Speed fourteen knots. Cruisers take station six cables on starboard beam of flagship, sir!" rattles off the chief yeoman, as again the distant flagship drapes herself in bunting.

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A few minutes later the battleship begins to move through the water dead in the wake of her next ahead, and in five minutes the fleet is steaming to sea in ordered formation.

But the work of the signalman is not over. It never is. Perhaps the flagship wishes to make some signal which is too long to be made by flags. She hoists a blue-and-white striped flag at her yardarm, and then three of her semaphores start talking simultaneously.

The arms whirl with such lightning velocity that they seem to be always on the move, but in spite of this a signalman, with a telescope to his eye, is calmly spelling out the words as they are made to a man beside him, who writes them down on a signal-pad.

Perhaps the fleet is anchored in some harbour. It is ten o'clock at night, with a falling barometer, and the rain coming down in torrents. But even then the signalmen, clad this time in oilskins, are keeping their watch.

The flagship has something to say, and the electric flashing lamp at her masthead suddenly starts blinking. Before she has been doing it for five seconds all the other ships have followed suit, and then begins a dazzling, dizzying series of longs and shorts.

But a signalman, with his mate beside him, writing down, is taking in the message: "Leave will be granted to one watch," it runs, "from noon on Friday next to noon on Monday. Ships are to signal number of men proceeding on leave before 4 p.m. to-morrow."

The tired man looks pleased. His life has its compensations, after all.

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"MAN OVERBOARD!"

THE squadron of eight battleships is steaming along in two orderly lines of four vessels each, but so precise are the intervals between the ships as each one follows dead in the wake of her next ahead, that it seems as if all the vessels were connected together by an invisible thread.

Standing close by the standard compass of one of the vessels is her officer of the watch. He looks absurdly young; he is, in fact, barely twenty-three years of age, but still he wears the two gold stripes of a lieutenant upon his coat sleeves, and the fact that he is temporarily in charge of a battleship carrying nearly 800 men, and worth two millions of his country's money, does not seem to worry him at all.

But it is not to be wondered at, for when he was of the age at which most boys were at school, he was learning his trade and acquiring habits of responsibility in one of the most efficient schools of the world, one of His Majesty's ships. And now, having attained the dignity of lieutenant's rank, he has proved himself competent for his work.

It is Saturday afternoon, the sailor's half-holiday, and down below on deck the band is playing selections while some of the men are dancing. The officer of the watch instinctively beats time to the music with his foot, when the band stops abruptly, and there is a wild shout of "Man overboard!"

Glancing hurriedly astern he sees a man's head bobbing up and down in the water on the starboard side of the ship; the marine sentry on the lifebuoy has seen it too, and, with great presence

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of mind, lets go the large copper lifebuoy, as the sailor floats past the stern. The calcium lights with which it is fitted burst into flame on touching the water.

The lieutenant realises all this in a flash and puts his mouth to the voice-pipe and delivers a series of rapid orders to the quartermaster at the wheel below.

"Stop both engines! Hard-aport. Call away the starboard lifeboat!"

Another glance astern satisfies him that the man is clear of the propellers, and he then gives the order: "Full speed astern both," and gives the lanyard of the steam siren three sharp tugs, the signal for going astern.

On the lower bridge, meanwhile, there is considerable bustle and flurry. One of the midshipmen on watch has ordered a signalman aloft with a telescope to keep an eye on the man in the water, while the men attending the cones, hoisted point upwards at the yardarm to show the ship was moving ahead, haul them down and rehoist them point downwards to tell the ship astern that our engines have been reversed. A pendant with a red cross on a white ground and a red, white, and blue fly—meaning "Man overboard"—has been shown just over the bridge rail. Someone has already informed the captain of what has occurred, and down on deck the boatswain's mate of the watch has been piping "Away lifeboat's crew!" at the pitch of his lungs.

One cutter each side of the ship is always kept turned out ready for an emergency of this kind.

The great ship swings out of the line under the influence of her helm, and a second or two later begins to vibrate as her turbines drive the propellers astern.

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The captain arrives on the bridge breathless, but seeing that the officer of the watch is doing the right thing, does not interfere, and contents himself with motioning to the commander to lower the cutter, for the ship's movement through the water is decreasing rapidly. A midshipman scrambles into the boat, and as the lowerers pay out the falls, she descends towards the water. Luckily the sea is almost flat calm and there is no danger, and, when the cutter is within six feet of the surface, the commander gives the order, "'Vast lowering!"

Another nod from the captain, and he orders, "Out pins!"

"Pins out, sir!" replies the midshipman in the boat.

"Slip!"

The petty officer in the cutter releases the line of the disengaging gear, and before one can quite realise what has happened, the boat has fallen into the water with a splash and a thud, and her lifebelted crew are getting their oars to work.

The engines, meanwhile, have been stopped and the ship is stationary, and every eye on the ship is fixed on the lifebuoy in the water, now fully half-a-mile astern. At first they can see no signs of the man, but at length the sharp eyes of the lieutenant on watch detect what he thinks is a human head.

"D'you see him?" inquires the captain anxiously, hearing his subordinate's muffled exclamation.

"Yes, sir," answers the young officer, focussing his glasses on the spot. "He has hold of the buoy all right!"

"Thank Heaven!" mutters the other, in a relieved voice.

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The cutter, meanwhile, with her fourteen sturdy oarsmen making the water fly into foam, is pulling towards the buoy. Then the two bowmen boat their oars; the others back water to check the way, and their sodden shipmate is dragged into the boat over the bows. An audible sigh of relief goes up from the crowd assembled on deck when it is realised the man is safe.

The "Affirmative flag," red with a white cross, is hoisted below the red, white, and blue pendant, to show the fleet that the sailor has not been drowned, and even the admiral, far away in his flagship, heaves a sigh of satisfaction when he sees it.

If the "Negative flag," white with five black crosses, had been displayed, he would have known that the worst had happened, and that a life had been lost.

But the cutter, having recovered the lifebuoy, is rapidly approaching. She comes alongside, and a sodden, blue-clad figure, looking very sheepish and sorry for himself, clambers up the rope ladder, and is speedily taken charge of by the doctor. But, beyond feeling very cold and numb, the victim is none the worse for his involuntary immersion, and half an hour later the stove in the sick berth brings about his complete recovery.

On deck, meanwhile, the boat has been hoisted, and the ship has gone on to take up her proper position in the fleet, which stopped when the accident occurred. In half an hour from the time the man fell overboard she is in station, and the whole squadron is moving ahead as if nothing had happened. The captain turns to leave the bridge to resume his interrupted writing, and as he does so he looks at the officer of the watch.

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"Well done," he observes, with a smile. "I couldn't have done it better myself!"

The lieutenant flushes with pleasure and salutes, and a minute later, when his superior has disappeared, has resumed his task of station-keeping.

THE LANGUAGE OF THE NAVY

If an ordinary "shore-loafer," as a bluejacket sometimes calls a civilian, were suddenly transferred to one of His Majesty's battleships he would probably spend his first few days on board in a state of hopeless bewilderment, for there is hardly an officer, man, or article which is not commonly referred to by a nickname. Some of the slang terms used are quite understandable, but others are very far-fetched and nobody quite knows how they ever came to be used.

The captain of a ship is invariably "the owner," "old man" or "skipper," while the commander —the second in command—is "the bloke." The first lieutenant (a lieutenant-commander as he usually is nowadays) is "Jimmy the One"; the gunnery and torpedo lieutenants, the "Gunnery Jack" and "Torpedo Jack" respectively, but, to their messmates in the wardroom, these three officers, with the officer borne for navigating duties, are usually "Number One," "Guns," "Torps," and "Pilot."

A lieutenant-commander is a "two-and-a-half striper," from the two thick and one thin stripes of gold lace he carries on his coat sleeves, and a lieutenant is a "two-striper" from his badge of rank. The paymaster is the "pusser" or "paybob," both sufficiently clear to need no

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explanation, and his subordinate, the assistant paymaster or "A.P.," is sometimes a "tizzy snatcher." The chaplain is a "sky pilot," "devil dodger," or "Holy Joe," but in the ward-room is invariably referred to as the "padrè."

The gunner is "Old Blue Lights," because he is responsible for the port-fires, rockets, and other fireworks, while the carpenter is "chips." A midshipman is a "snotty," for a reason which has been explained elsewhere in this book, while more often than not an artificer engineer—a warrant officer—is called a "steam bos'un."

The master-at-arms, the chief of the ship's police, is the "jaunty," a corruption of the French 'gendarme,' while his attendant satellites, the ship's corporals, are dubbed "crushers." An "E.R.A." (engine-room artificer) is sometimes a "scissor grinder," and a carpenter's mate a "woodspoiler" or "chippy chap." The cooper, who is responsible for unheading casks, etc., is "Jimmy Bungs"; "putty" is the painter, but "tanky" is the petty officer, or leading seaman, who does duty as captain of the hold and who, by virtue of his office, looks after and is responsible for the ship's fresh-water tanks. A signalman is "buntin'" or a "bunting tosser," from the material of which his flags are made, while a wireless telegraphist is generally "sparko," but sometimes an "angel," from the wings incorporated in his badge of office.

"Slushy" is the ship's cook, so called because of the fat which collects on the top of the cooking coppers, and which, in olden days, had to be collected and handed over to the boatswain for anointing the rigging. A man surnamed Wilson is always "Tug"; a Harris, "Chats"; a Taylor, "Buck"; a Clark or Hewitt, "Nobby";

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a Martin, "Pincher"; a Miller, "Dusty"; a Wright or White, "Shiny" or "Shiner," and so on with all the commoner surnames.

A drummer goes by the name of "sticks," from the implements with which he beats his drum, while seamen never refer to themselves as "sailors," but as "flat-feet" or "matloes," the latter word being again derived from the French. A Royal marine is a "bullock," "turkey," or "Joey," while a soldier is a "grabby" or "leather-neck." The "C.I.V.'s" or "Selborne's Light Horse," however, are not regiments, but are the names given to the temporary service ordinary seamen who entered the Navy for five years while Lord Selborne was First Lord of the Admiralty. The scheme was brought in soon after the South African war, hence the names.

A funny man goes by the name of "cuts," while a proverbial story-teller is a "Tom Pepper." A "bird" is a man who is always "in the rattle," *i.e.* a defaulter, while an ordinary seaman is an "Ord" or "O.D." The steam pinnace is the "steam 'bus"; the engines the "bullgines," and an anchor a "killick" or "mudhook." A "snob" is a man who earns money in his spare time by repairing his shipmates' boots; to do "jewing" is to make or repair clothes, and "dobeying" is washing clothes. To "chaw your fat" is to argue, while to get angry is to "get dizzy" or "climb the rigging."

Men who are friendly with each other are "raggies," because they have the free run of each other's polishing paste and rags; but if their friendship terminates they are said to have "parted brass-rags."

A "fanny" does not refer to the seaman's sweetheart, but to the receptacle from which he

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drinks his "bubbly" or tot of rum. A "gibbey," moreover, is a spoon, and a "pusser's dagger" a clasp knife. A "duff," as most of us know, is a pudding, but a "schooner on the rocks" does not refer to a nautical disaster, but to meat and potatoes baked in a peculiar way.

"Fanny Adams" and "Harriet Lane" were the names once given to the preserved meat issued to seamen. These were two notorious women, murderesses, I think, and the men declared in jest that their victims were tinned and served out to the Navy as provisions. The galley stove funnel was once the "Charley Noble," and a "holiday" does not mean a day free from work, but a bare space left when painting, or a gap in a clothes line when garments are hung up to dry.

A "handy Billy" is a small tackle used for a variety of different purposes on board a ship, while "Haul away handsomely!" given as an order when men are hauling on a rope, does not mean "Pull for all you are worth!" but "Pull slowly and with care." A "soldier's wind" is a fair breeze in which anyone, even a "grabby," could sail a boat, and "Tell that to the Marines!" is a nautical way of telling a person you do not believe the yarn he has just spun. It originated in the days when the "bullocks" were supposed to be especially credulous, but nowadays it takes a fairly cunning person to "get to wind'ard" —or to get the better of—a member of the regiment of the sea.

Again, to take the names of ships. The *Queen Elizabeth*, as we know from letters home from the Dardanelles, is the "Lizzie" or "Big Lizzie," while the sister ships *Agamemnon* and *Lord Nelson* are the "Aggie" and "Nellie." The *Agincourt* is the "Gin Palace";

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and the *Cyclops* "'Ole One Eye." The *Chatham* is the "Tiddley Chats"; the *Dreadnought* the "Dread-o," and so on throughout the Navy List.

Enough has been said, however, to show what a variety of different unofficial terms are used on board His Majesty's ships, but those we have mentioned are only a tithe of those which are heard every day in "Andrew," as the bluejacket calls the Navy.

IN THE CHAINS

"By the d-e-e-p, nine!"

The peculiar, long-drawn-out cry of the leadsman in the chains echoes out as the cruiser gathers speed and begins to move through the water.

"By the m-a-r-k, ten!"

The man twirls the lead in the air, and reels off the sounding with mathematical accuracy. He is standing in the port "chains"—a small platform, perhaps four feet square—jutting out from one end of the cruiser's bridge. His position seems rather precarious, for his perch overhangs the dark water thirty feet below; but the man himself—a seasoned petty officer—feels perfectly safe, for he leans his body against a canvas 'apron,' waist high, while his feet are firmly braced against a wooden bar secured to the platform itself.

Watch him as he makes a cast. He first sees the end of the leadline is properly secured, and then proceeds to coil it up in his hand. The line itself, whitened by long use, has sundry little marks at various distances along it. At two fathoms (12 feet) from the lead are two strips of leather, while at three fathoms there are three.

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At five fathoms, and again at fifteen, is a piece of white bunting ; at seven and seventeen fathoms, a piece of red bunting ; and at ten, a piece of leather with a hole in it. At thirteen fathoms comes a rag of blue bunting, while at twenty there is a small bit of line, with two knots tied in it, spliced into the leadline itself.

The leadline is twenty-five fathoms long, while the lead, secured to its end, is about 14 lbs. in weight. The bottom of it is hollowed out to receive the " arming " of tallow or soap, and this allows the nature of the bottom to be ascertained, for the sticky substance will come to the surface with particles of mud or sand adhering to it.

Having coiled the line in his free hand, the leadsman lowers the lead until it is from two and a-half to three fathoms below him. He then takes the line in a half turn round his hand, and causes the lead to oscillate backwards and forwards by moving his hand. Once, twice it goes ; but the third time it has attained sufficient momentum until, at the end of its forward swing, the line is horizontal. He watches it, and suddenly draws in his arm with a jerk, and the lead, instead of falling back, goes flying round his head in a circle and at the full scope of the line he has allowed.

Once, twice, it goes ; faster and faster, but the third time he releases his warp just before it reaches its forward horizontal, and the weight, carrying the line after it, flies ahead in a curve and drops into the water with a ' plop,' almost on a level with the bows of the ship. The vessel, meanwhile, is travelling ahead and the leadsman rapidly gathers in the slack line, and then, by the time he is immediately over the place where the lead enters the water, he can feel it touching

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the bottom and notices that the ten fathom mark is just in line with the water's edge.

"By the m-a-r-k ten!" he calls.

If the water had been eight fathoms, for instance, he would have shouted, "By the d-e-e-p eight!" for the marked fathoms are known as 'marks' and the others as 'deeps.' Moreover, if the depth happened to be a quarter of a fathom less than a mark or a deep, the cry would have been, "A q-u-a-r-t-e-r less ten!" or "A q-u-a-r-t-e-r less six!" as the case may be, while if it was a quarter or half a fathom over a mark or deep the call would have been, "And a q-u-a-r-t-e-r ten!" "And a h-a-l-f six!" and so on.

"Heaving the lead" looks easy enough, and anybody who is accustomed to doing it will say that it is quite simple; but it takes a long time before a seaman becomes a proficient leadsman, for he must be capable of heaving with either the right or left hand, according to which side of the ship he happens to be stationed. A novice, too, is apt to be frightened at the whirling weight on the end of its line, and if he loses heart, and omits to give it that peculiar little jerk which brings it flying round in a circle, it may fall perpendicularly in close proximity to his head.

Heaving the lead may be all right enough in good weather, but in the winter, when it is blowing hard, raining, or snowing, it is anything but pleasant. The driving rain and snow searches out every portion of the leadsman's anatomy, even though he may be wearing oilskins. His hands get numb with cold, until there is no feeling left in them, even though he may have taken the precaution of anointing them with oil.

The deep-sea leadline, which was invariably used for deep-water work before the introduction

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of patent sounding machines, and would still be used if they broke down, consists of 100 fathoms of line and a 28-lb. lead. It is marked up to 20 fathoms in the same way as the hand leadline, and then at 25, 35, 45, etc., fathoms with one knot, and at 30, 40, 50, etc., with three, four, or five knots, and so on, to the greatest depth of the line.

The ship is usually stopped when using this method, for it takes a considerable time for the lead to reach the bottom.

The patent sounding machine consists of 300 fathoms of thin piano wire wound on a drum, and to the end of the wire is secured a 24-lb. lead, with, just above it, a perforated brass sheath fitted with a cap. Before sounding takes place a glass tube, open at one end and coated on the inside with a red chemical compound, is placed in the brass sheath. The wire is then allowed to run out until the lead is on the bottom, and as it descends the pressure forces the water up the glass tube, and turns the red chemical into a milky-white colour for a certain distance up it.

The lead is then hauled in by hand, or by a motor, and the depth is ascertained by comparing the line of demarcation between the two colours in the glass tube with a wooden scale marked in fathoms.

With these simple but extremely reliable machines soundings can be obtained at greater depths, and with the ship travelling at a far greater speed, than with the hand lead and line, though, as already stated, the older method is always held in reserve. No man-of-war ever enters a harbour, moreover, without a couple of leadsmen in the chains.

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"UP ANCHOR!"

It is a very still summer's morning; so still that not even an errant catspaw of wind disturbs the glassy surface of the water.

It is barely 5 a.m., and the little town is fast asleep; but anchored in the landlocked bay is a small, grey-hulled light cruiser with, inshore of her, a dozen black torpedo boat destroyers.

The reflection of the ships is reproduced in the calm water with the accuracy of a mirror, and the little cruiser, with her slender hull, single raking mast, and three equal-sized funnels, looks trim, shapely, and well proportioned.

She reminds us, somehow, of a well-dressed woman admiring herself in a looking-glass; but the destroyers, with their black, dingy-looking hulls, stumpy funnels, and sombre appearance, give a very different impression. They are raising steam, and the clear sky is stained with their oily, black smoke.

Presently the cruiser follows suit, and the vapour from her funnels gets denser and denser as shovelful after shovelful of coal is thrown on to the furnaces below. A quarter of an hour later small knots of blue-clad men are mustering on the forecastles of all the men-of-war, and as the tinkle of three bells—5.30—echoes out across the water, a pair of coloured flags creep to the cruiser's masthead.

There is no wind to blow them clear, but the destroyers know what they mean, for the red and white "answering pendant" creeps to each of their mastheads.

"All answered, sir!" says the signal boatswain on the cruiser's bridge.

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The captain nods, moves to the bridge screen, and waves a hand to the officer waiting on the forecastle below. The flags come down from the masthead in a rush, and at the same instant thirteen capstans start revolving.

"Clank, clank-clank, clank!" they go, as the cables begin to come in.

"Up and down, sir!" the cruiser's cable officer suddenly hails, as the cable comes in until it hangs vertically from the bows with the 2½-ton anchor on the bottom immediately underneath the ship.

"Anchor's away, sir!" an instant later.

"Clear anchor, sir!" again. "'Vast heaving!" he adds a minute later to the man working the capstan, as the stockless anchor climbs laboriously into its hawse-pipe. "On slips!"

"Anchor and cable secured, sir!" hails the officer from the forecastle.

On the cruiser's bridge, meanwhile, they have been very busy.

Another string of coloured bunting suddenly dips from her masthead, and she starts to move through the water, and, as she does so, the destroyers hurry into their appointed stations astern of her.

In another ten minutes they are out of sight behind the land to the left of the lighthouse, and nothing remains to tell of their presence except a rapidly vanishing blur of dun-coloured smoke against the blue of the sky.

When the inhabitants of the little town rise from their slumbers, their harbour is deserted. Another of His Majesty's destroyer flotillas has put to sea.

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HOMEWARD BOUND

Fog, dark, blinding fog everywhere. The impenetrable grey pall hangs over the calm surface of the sea like a blanket, until it is barely possible to see more than a quarter of a mile.

The cruiser is feeling her way anxiously through the murk. Her engines are driving her at barely six knots, while the men at the patent sounding-machines are having their work cut out, for the lead is being dropped into the water every ten minutes to ascertain the depth.

High up on the bridge stands the captain, with his navigating lieutenant and the officer of the watch. The ship is on her way home from China, and is groping her way up the English Channel.

"Grr!" growls the captain, watching the moisture dropping off the polished top of the standard compass. "This is a thorough English welcome, I must say!"

The navigator, a married man with a wife he has not seen for two years waiting for him at Portsmouth, agrees.

"It's pretty beastly, sir," he says; "and I'm afraid that if we have to crawl along like this for very much longer we shan't get in till late to-night."

Presently a petty officer arrives on the bridge. He is in charge of the sounding-party, and he brings forward for the navigator's inspection a glass tube, sealed at one end, and a graduated wooden scale.

The thin glass tube, having been placed in a brass case, went down to the bottom of the sea with the 24-lb. lead the last time it was dropped.

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The interior surface of the glass was coated with a red chemical which turned an opaque milky-white on contact with the water, and when it reached the bottom the pressure forced the water a certain distance up the tube until there was a clear mark of demarcation betwixt the white and the red.

The navigator places the tube alongside the scale, and notices that the dividing line comes opposite a spot marked 33.

"H'm!" he remarks. "We're in thirty-three fathoms. What's the bottom?"

The petty officer, who has taken care to place a lump of soap in the recess in the bottom of the lead, is quite ready for the question.

"Fine sand and shells, sir," he replies, for he has found a small quantity of these substances adhering to the soap when the lead was hauled in.

The navigator, followed by the captain, walks over to the chart-table and examines the printed sheet upon which the ship's course is marked.

"We're here, sir," he observes, putting his finger down. "The soundings taken during the last two hours tally exactly."

"That's good," replies the other in a relieved voice, for finding one's way in a fog at sea is always a matter of some anxiety. "We can stand on our present course for a little longer —what?"

"Yes, sir," answers his subordinate. "We can carry on until we hear the submarine bell on the Nab Lightship." He is referring to the light vessel which is moored off the eastern entrance to Spithead, the anchorage off Portsmouth, and which is picked up by all incoming vessels.

Suddenly, from the murk right ahead, comes

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the deep, raucous bellow of another ship's whistle. "Boom—boom!" it goes.

"Whereabouts is she, d'you think?" asks the captain, listening.

"Dead ahead, sir," answers the officer of the watch.

"All right. Alter course a couple of points to starboard."

The officer puts his lips to the voice-pipe and gives an order to the man at the wheel below, and the cruiser's bows swing off to the right. At the same time the siren has given one shrill yelp, meaning: "I am altering course to starboard," and a minute or so later the stranger makes the same signal.

After a hasty glance at the chart the lieutenant for navigating duties tumbles down the ladder and disappears in the chart-house. Inside, screwed to the wall, is a small brass box, with a couple of ordinary telephone receivers suspended from hooks. There is also a small thumbscrew, which, on being turned, causes the words "Port" or "Starboard" to appear in a small orifice in the front of the box itself.

Water, as is well known, carries sound four times more rapidly than air, and to a far greater distance, and many lightships and lighthouses are fitted with submarine bells, which ring during fog for a certain number of seconds at stated intervals.

Deep down below the water-line on either side of the bows of the cruiser are a couple of small tanks open to the sea and fastened securely to the inner skin of the ship. Inside these are suspended delicate receivers capable of detecting the sound of a submarine bell for a distance of fully fifteen miles, at which radius the most

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powerful steam-whistle or siren would be quite inaudible.

These receivers are connected by means of wires to the telephone receivers on the bridge, and, putting the latter to his ears, the navigator listens intently.

Before he has been listening for a minute he hears a faint clanging. It sounds very far away—something like the sound of a bell in a phonograph—but he notes the interval between the rings and gives a sigh of relief, for he recognises it from the description on the chart as the submarine bell on the Nab Lightship, fully twelve miles away.

In an hour's time a faint trumpeting is heard dead ahead. The sound gradually draws closer, and before long it is recognised as the fog syren of the light-vessel.

The murk, meanwhile, has lifted until it is possible to see about a mile, and presently there slides into view the welcome red shape of the lightship herself, with "NAB" in large white letters on her sides.

When within half a mile, the ship alters course again, and before she has travelled far in the new direction the fog begins to break up into scattered wisps of vapour. Half an hour later she slides out of a wall of mist into the brilliant sunlight beyond, and, as she steams slowly past the black-and-white chequered forts guarding the entrance to Spithead, her decks are crowded with men enjoying their first sight of England after two years' exile in China. They gaze at it longingly. It looks very good, and to-night they will be ashore in "Pompey."*

* "Pompey," the naval term for Portsmouth.

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THE WAVES OF THE OCEAN

THE title of this may be somewhat of a misnomer, for no seaman ever talks of "waves," while aboard a ship the word is hardly ever mentioned. A sailor invariably refers to a wave as "a sea," and in talking of an "ugly sea," or a "heavy sea," he is not using the adjectives in their generally accepted sense, but rather as a means of saying that the sea itself is threatening or dangerous.

Before going any further, also, it may be said that certain folk are apt to imagine that the water causing the undulations on the surface of the sea is actually travelling forward. This is not the case, and to explain the true motion of the waves on the surface of the ocean it is as well to employ a simple but efficient illustration. Imagine a long length of string made fast at one end; take the free end in your hand and impart to it a vertical up and down motion. A series of curves or undulations will then be seen to travel throughout the entire length of the string, and although the latter itself is not moving forward, the undulations are. Now the string represents the surface of the sea, and the motion imparted by your hand the force—generally wind—which has created the waves, and it will thus be realised that the sea itself is not actually moving forward, but rather that the character of its surface is continually changing its contour.

The watching of waves breaking against a steep coast, the gigantic hillocks of water dashing themselves into masses of spray against the rock-bound shore, has a great fascination for many folk, some of whom, myself included, are quite content to spend hours looking at the vast tumult

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of yeasty froth at their feet. Breaking waves are undoubtedly things of beauty, and when a stiff breeze is blowing and the brilliant azure of the sky is streaked with mare's tails, while the sun shining through the curling tops of the breakers is turning them into a vivid emerald green which contrasts sharply with the blue of the ocean beyond, there is, without a doubt, a supreme satisfaction in watching the magnificent sight.

To see waves at their best, however, they must be observed from the deck of a ship far out at sea. Here we have the ocean in all its glory, and the deep-bosomed hillocks roll towards us with a solemn and majestic cadence which is quite unchecked by the proximity of land or shallow water. The deep blues, greens, and purples, in their unlimited gradation of tone, are flecked here and there by the creamy smother of a breaking sea. The sunlight filtering through the spray as it is flung to leeward on the wings of the wind, imparts to it all the beautiful prismatic hues of a rainbow. But quite apart from their gorgeous colouring, there is something very fascinating in the mere shape of the approaching undulations, for their beautiful outlines, moulded by the wind into an infinite variety of symmetrical curves, form in themselves a picture to which no artist could do full justice. The restless, ever-changing ocean is always a magnificent sight, but at such a time as this it is more beautiful than at any other.

There are many different types of waves, but what is known to a sailor as a "confused sea" is perhaps the most dangerous. A tumult of this description may be caused in many different ways, but it will often be seen in shallow water, where the wind is blowing against the set of the

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current or tide. The waves will be curling sullenly against the wind, but, being driven forward by the current in the teeth of the gale, will assume a steep and most terrifying aspect. The water-masses have no forward motion, and rise almost perpendicularly until they break in masses of seething foam. To a small ship such a sea is very dangerous, for the waves are so steep that they tend to curl and fall on deck with all the overpowering weight of solid water which causes destruction and disaster.

"Overfalls" also are caused in much the same way, but more particularly where two tides or currents meet. In the Pentland Firth, for example, the sea may be perfectly smooth, but in the shallower spots, where the currents meet, there will be a leaping maelstrom of foaming water in which nothing but a big ship could live. The waves rise and fall in no regular cadence, but in confused, leaping masses, and woe betide the unfortunate ship who finds herself in the midst of such a commotion, for in places the water will be circling like a whirlpool and the ship will be turned round and round with such lightning velocity that her rudder and sails will be powerless to help her.

The undulations which are seen on the surface of the ocean on an otherwise calm day are known to seamen as a "swell." There is no wind, but the smooth hillocks of water, without a vestige of foam about them, roll on in their regular parallel lines. In some parts of the world a swell of this kind may be caused by submarine upheavals, but around the British Isles a swell usually makes its appearance either immediately before or after a storm. A heavy gale blowing some distance away will also cause a long ocean

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swell to advance before it, which will not, as a rule, subside until the wind has blown from a contrary direction and has formed new waves to counteract the others. That is why in some cases the swell will be advancing in a contrary direction to a gentle breeze which is not strong enough to create fresh waves of its own.

The watching of waves has a great fascination for many of us. With all their beauty of form and colour, and beyond all, their uncertainty, they transform the otherwise placid sea into the living, restless ocean, whose calmness or turbulence spells joy or misery to those of our brethren who earn their living on the great waters by which our islands are encompassed.

THE SNOTTIES

To the Captain who keeps up the traditions and uses the terms of the "Old Navy" they are generally known as "the young gentlemen." Collectively, the Commander occasionally refers to them as "young devils," and to their habitat, the gunroom, as the "horrible den." But even he, potentate that he is, and ruler of the destinies of nine hundred men, realises that there is much that is good in them, and that modern midshipmen are just the same boys as they were twenty years ago, and very human boys at that. He remembers that he himself, with his fellows, was, unjustly as he thought, branded as a limb of Satan by a long-suffering and easy-going Commander a score of years ago, so really, though perhaps he might not admit it, he has a warm corner in his heart for the present-day young officers whose failure or success in the Service so

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greatly depend upon his treatment of them in this, their first sea-going ship. He does sometimes stop their leave in just punishment for their sins, but just to show there is no ill-feeling he invites them all in turn to dine with him in the ward-room, and is, in consequence, voted an excellent fellow, as indeed he is.

To the senior Sub-Lieutenant, who is responsible for the discipline and tone of the gunroom, the newly-joined midshipmen are "crabs" or "warts," mere excrescences on the face of the earth, and as often as not he upholds the dignity of his single gold stripe by the painful application of a cane. But he never punishes unjustly. He was a midshipman himself not so very long ago, and even his victims derive no small satisfaction by realising that for every sin for which they are castigated there have been fully twenty more which have gone undiscovered and unpunished.

In this particular ship the Sub is something of an autocrat in the gunroom. His word is law, and he has drilled his "crabs" into a high state of discipline. There are eight of them, eight boys who, but for the war, would still be cadets at Dartmouth College instead of responsible officers in His Majesty's Fleet, and for the purpose of providing recreation for the officers who are bidden as guests to the gunroom on Thursday "guest-nights," and also, let it be said, for the amusement of the Sub himself and the other more senior occupants of the "horrible den," he has formed them into a ballet of no mean order. Their attire on such occasions is scanty, and consists principally of straw hats—relics of the days before the war, when one went ashore in plain clothes—bath towels, identity discs, and sea-boots. Their singing and dancing to the

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strains of the elderly, rather asthmatic, gunroom piano is highly original, sometimes rather topical, but the show would fetch crowds to a music-hall, and invariably brings genuine tears of laughter to the eyes of the audience. Even the performers themselves enjoy it, and cherish the hope that when they themselves are subs they too will have a "crab" ballet for the delectation of their guests.

Officially, these young officers are "midshipmen," but they invariably refer to each other and to themselves as "snotties"—just "snotties."

Now the derivation of this inelegant term happened in this wise. A "snot rag," as every schoolboy knows, is the slang term for a pocket handkerchief, and the term "snotty," as applied to midshipmen, came in at the time when their Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty ordained that the young gentlemen should wear three buttons on the sleeves of their full-dress round jackets. The buttons, according to certain ribald persons who wished to cast ridicule upon the midshipmen, were placed there to prevent their wearers from putting the sleeves of their garments to the use generally delegated to pocket handkerchiefs. It was nothing but a libel, of course, but the nickname still survives, and will survive to the crack o' doom.

We read in newspaper articles and boys' books of adventure of "middies." We sometimes even hear the term used in conversation round tea-tables ashore, but to call a present-day midshipman a "middy" to his face would make him squirm. He would be far too polite to correct you, but the diminutive term necessarily implies something small—something, in fact, like the blue-eyed, rosy-cheeked, curly-haired youngsters of Captain Marryat's novels. In his day midshipmen

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went to sea at the ages of twelve and thirteen, but nowadays many of them are over six feet and are sturdy withal. Most of them shave.

Some years ago a party of American ladies were being shown over a British cruiser in Hong Kong harbour. Their host, the Fleet Surgeon, happened to mention that one of the midshipmen, down with the fever usually known as "Hong Kong dog," was lying ill in one of the cabins.

"Say, doctor," said one of the girls, full of sympathy, "let's go in and brighten up the poor little chap. Your middies are too 'cute for words. I just love them!"

The Fleet Surgeon, smiling to himself, went in and prepared his patient for the visit, and presently emerged from the cabin and beckoned his guests to enter. They did so, but the sight that met their eyes was hardly what they expected. The figure lying on the bunk was not a blue-eyed, smooth-faced boy. On the contrary, they beheld a grown man six feet tall, with a ten days' stubble on his chin, who told them in a bass voice that he was very glad to see them!

Midshipmen, we are sometimes told, are really nothing more nor less then glorified schoolboys, for, though they are officers wearing the King's uniform, they are subjected to a very rigid discipline and an iron-bound routine. Most of their working hours, moreover, are spent under instruction. They are learning their trade, it is true; they receive for their labours no more than one-and-ninepence a day from the Government, but, none the less, they are not schoolboys by any manner of means.

At an age when their brothers are still at Eton and Harrow, they have come to learn responsibility—responsibility with a capital R.

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From the very day, then, that they join their first sea-going ship our midshipmen are gaining experience and learning the command of men. Watch them in their boats in all weathers.

It is a beautiful summer's day in June, 1914, a full six weeks before the war started, and here is a cutter from the battleship out in the bay approaching the landing place under sail. The boat, 32 feet long, weighs about 2½ tons, and with her spotless grey hull and shining badge, her white enamelled interior, and thwarts, oars, and woodwork scrubbed with sand and canvas until they are as white as driven snow, looks a veritable little yacht. Her twin lug-sails belly out in the following breeze with purple shadows playing across their wind-curved, cream-coloured surfaces, and as she heels over we can just see the heads of her crew who are squatted like graven images on the bottom boards. She is manned by fourteen men and a petty officer, and in charge of her is a midshipman.

A year ago he was still a boy at the Royal Naval College at Dartmouth, but now, with his right hand gripping the tiller until his knuckles whiten, and a short brass-bound dirk hanging on his left hip, he is very much an officer. He is learning responsibility; learning to command men, men who were in the Service before he was clear of his mother's apron strings. But, youthful martinet as he sometimes is, they all love him, and would willingly die with him if the worst came to the worst.

The cutter comes nearer, and we see her snotty measuring the distance to the landing place with his eye. He gives a glance forward, tightens his grip on the tiller, and then raps out his first order.

"Stand by fore halliard and topping lift!"

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The men in the bottom of the boat move to their places on the thwarts.

"Down foresail! Aft main sheet!"

The large dipping lug forward comes down with a run, and is gathered in as the boat travels round on a curve under the influence of her helm.

"Top up main sail!" And the man stationed at the topping lift hauls away hand over hand until the boom is up and down the mast, and the wind is spilled out of the sail.

The midshipman has judged it to a nicety, for the boat glides on with just enough momentum to carry her alongside, but without sufficient impact to crack an egg. He has learnt how to do it by experience, and though he himself would tell you that it is as easy as falling off a log, his experience has not all been gained in balmy weather like this.

As often as not he has been away under sail in half a gale o' wind with a couple of reefs down, and his boat smoking along with the water lapping in over the lee gunwale and most of the crew sitting up to windward while the rest bale.

Risky work? Certainly. There is danger of a capsize and a man or two being drowned if Mr. Midshipman-at-the-helm does something wrong—such things have happened. Risky work, yes; but an excellent test of commonsense and seamanship, so our young friend profits by it. Enjoys it, in fact, for what man-boy does not enjoy an ordeal with a spice of danger in it?

Have you ever seen a picket boat? No?

Imagine a decked steamboat fifty-six feet long, sometimes a little less, and narrow for her length. She has clean, sweet-looking lines and, though fitted with only one propeller, is capable, with her double rudders, of turning in

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almost her own length. For her size her engines are very powerful, and there are occasions, when she is racing another craft of her type, for instance, or when Puddicombe, her Stoker Petty Officer, is anxious to get back to his ship in time for tea, when she has been known to rattle along at something over fifteen knots.

Now each large battleship or cruiser in the Service carries a couple of these craft in addition to her numerous rowing and sailing boats. They are used for a variety of purposes, and in peace time in a crowded anchorage they can always be seen buzzing about from ship to ship, and from ship to shore. They run day and night, year in and year out, fair weather or foul, and, once more, are in charge of midshipmen.

It is a pretty sight to see one of these trim little craft on an errand when the barometer is falling, and the rapidly rising wind is cutting the tops off the short, snappy little seas. The picket boat rolls and pitches terribly. At one moment her forefoot is out of water and the next the bows disappear in a welter of grey and white water, while a cloud of spray goes flying aft high over her funnel top. Aft at the steering wheel are two sea-booted, oilskinned figures hanging on for dear life as the boat wallows. One is the petty officer coxswain, the other the midshipman in charge. The snotty's face is rosy with the sting of the driving spray. His smarting eyes are abominably full of salt, and he can feel the water finding its way between his oil-skin jacket and the towel round his neck. Presently it will be trickling down the small of his back.

But wet and uncomfortable as he is he is enjoying himself. The picket boat is his first independent command, and he relishes the sensa-

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tion of feeling the live thing under his feet obeying his slightest wish ; and once more he is gaining experience—experience which his brothers at school will never enjoy, for a midshipman who can manœuvre a picket boat in all weathers without smashing things up will make a good destroyer officer in the future, while a good destroyer officer may one day become the captain of a 20,000-ton battleship costing two and a quarter millions, and carrying close on a thousand men.

But now we are at war all the old routine of peace has gone by the board, and the work of the midshipman is more responsible than ever. They have shared all the perils and vicissitudes of the campaign afloat with the other members of their service, and well over fifty of them, many of them fresh from the College at Dartmouth, have gone to their long, last sleep in the *Good Hope, Monmouth* and other ships. They have died for their country, but their gallant young lives have not been wasted.

Through the medium of the newspapers and published naval despatches we have had occasional glimpses of the work our midshipmen have done in the Dardanelles. Who will ever forget the gallant deeds performed by two of them—Wilfrid Malleson of the Royal Navy and George Drewry of the Royal Naval Reserve—at that awful landing of the troops at X Beach, near Seddul Bahr, in the Dardanelles, on April 25th last ?

The steamer *River Clyde* had been run ashore under the fire of the entrenched Turks to form the outer end of a pier or jetty on which the soldiers could be disembarked from their boats. Connecting the ship with the shore was a bridge formed of empty lighters with broad wooden gangways passing over them.

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At first all went well, and the bridge was successfully placed, but soon the strong current swept the shore end of the frail structure away from the beach and the troops crowded into the lighters could not land.

Then it was that the gallant Commander Unwin—who afterwards received the V.C.—called for volunteers to get the bridge of boats back into position. They were soon forthcoming; among them the two midshipmen, and these heroic youngsters leapt into the water in the face of a murderous, close-range fire from hundreds of rifles and machine-guns and swam from lighter to lighter with lines to join them together and so allow the troops to land.

They were awarded the Victoria Cross for their bravery, and never were decorations more richly deserved, while it is all the more pleasing to think that two of the wearers of the coveted bronze token of valour are young gentlemen of barely eighteen years of age.

These deeds stand quite by themselves, but one outstanding feature of the Dardanelles naval honours list was the number of Distinguished Service Crosses bestowed upon midshipmen still in their 'teens.

They were, in the great majority of cases, conferred upon the young officers who were in charge of the men-of-war's boats during the landing of the troops, boy heroes in their picket boats, launches, pinnaces, and cutters, who, in the face of a veritable hailstorm of rifle and shrapnel bullets landed the soldiers on a hostile beach.

They could not reply to the fire; did not have the satisfaction of knowing that if they survived they would presently have the excitement of

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charging the hostile trenches. All they had to do was to take the long strings of boats, each in tow of its own steamboat, safely in to the assigned landing places, and right gallantly they did it.

The troops crowded into the boats, and the seamen crews were hit right and left. Many of the craft themselves reached the shore in a sinking condition and with practically every soul on board killed or wounded. But still the work went on. There was no wavering, and if ever the full story of that awful landing comes to be written, the names of the midshipmen concerned should be inscribed in letters of gold, for no small measure of the success was due to them.

So the next time you meet a young officer in naval uniform with the white patches on his collar, look at him closely. You will probably think that he is absurdly juvenile. He may be, but, nevertheless, he is a very gallant young gentleman.

THE DESTROYERS

THE Lieutenant-Commander ducks his head instinctively as a shower of spray comes flying over the bows to patter against the painted canvas bridge-screens like a volley of small shot. The Sub-Lieutenant on watch, less lucky and less wary, receives the cold douche full in his face. "Pouf!" he splutters, laughing, shaking the drops out of his eyes. "Smack in the eye!"

"Lucky it wasn't a green sea, young fella'," remarked the Lieutenant-Commander with a grin, stumping to the end of the heaving bridge. He looks aft to where, about 200 yards astern, the sharp bow of the "next astern" is carving its

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way through the grey-white water at 20 knots. He then glances overhead at the sky and frowns. Frowns, because the glass is dropping fast, and the grey heavens are streaked with wrack and mare's tails. Those signs, he knows well enough, betoken wind. Wind, and plenty of it.

It is regular North Sea weather, destroyer weather, and the wind cuts like a knife. It is blowing a fresh breeze from the north-east. There is nothing in the way of a really heavy sea, but the short, crisp, perpendicular waves make the little vessel jump and plunge about like a bucking pony. She is abominably wet, too, for sheets of spray come flying over the bows and across the low-lying deck until the once black funnels are caked white with salt, and every soul on board is soaked to the skin in spite of oilskins.

Nobody really likes bad weather, but the officers and men have become inured to this sort of thing. Off and on for a good many months, ever since the war started—in fact, their ship has been at sea in all weathers. At first, before they really got used to the strenuous life, it was rather trying. In the winter, when the spray sometimes freezes as it falls, and the seas come over waist deep, it is positively cruel. In the summer the conditions were rather better, but the wind still had an unhappy knack of finding its way through the stoutest garments, and the water of slowly percolating through a series of woollen mufflers and down the small of one's back until it finally came to rest in each sea-boot.

Taking it all round, though, officers and men find it very difficult to realise that they are actually on "active service." The conditions under which they work are, of course, infinitely more rigorous than those which obtain in the

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piping times of peace. Then they were apt to growl if they did not get every third "week end" at home. Nowadays a couple or three hours ashore once a week or fortnight is looked upon as a veritable Godsend, but they all have become so used to it that living on board week after week seems perfectly natural.

At sea men are stationed at the guns and torpedo-tubes day and night, but actual contact with the enemy has been very rare indeed. They have had a couple of exciting interludes in the Heligoland Bight, interludes which came as a joyous distraction, and which taught them that being under fire was not quite so bad as they had imagined it would be. They have sighted and chased a Zeppelin or two, its unwieldy bulk looking like a gigantic German sausage against the sunset, and on one occasion they saw a hostile submarine on the horizon, and gave chase at full speed. But the wily bird took very good care to dive before the destroyer came within striking distance, and then, of course, it was rather like looking for the proverbial needle in a haystack.

But apart from these few incidents it is difficult for them to realise that this is war. The ocean is always the same, war or no war, and if constantly being at sea in all weathers is "being on active service," most of them have come to realise that they have been fighting ever since they joined His Majesty's Navy.

It is true that the enemy's submarines have been very active against our merchantmen and fishing craft. One or two of the hostile "*unter-see booten*" have been rammed and sunk by lucky destroyers, while many others must have had nasty shaves of being sent to the bottom. The North Sea, too, has been well planted with mines,

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and almost every day "floaters," which have broken adrift from their moorings, are solemnly sunk by rifle fire.

Both mines and submarines were regarded with a certain amount of awe at the beginning of the war. People felt rather frightened of them, but now nobody evinces any particular emotion at their presence, for the keeping of an extra smart look-out for the first flutter of spray caused by a hostile periscope, or a rusty object floating in the water which might turn out to be a mine, has become second nature. Familiarity sometimes breeds contempt for a danger in a most surprising way.

On board, cheeriness seems the order of the day, and except for one unfortunate officer's steward, who is seasick every time the destroyer puts her nose outside a harbour, there is not a soul in the little ship who is not happy. One of the favourite topics of conversation with officers and men is whether the German High Sea Fleet will come out and fight. Another, whether or not there is going to be another Heligoland "stunt" for the benefit of the newcomers who have not seen a shot fired up to date. Other men secretly envy their comrades who were in the ships before the Dardanelles, where the veriest glutton for powder and shot would have been satisfied, but they console themselves by thinking, "Well, the North Sea is THE important place, anyhow."

The weeks and months pass very quickly, and no sooner has the destroyer arrived in harbour than she seems to be at sea again. Her officers and men lose all count of time, and all the days of the week seem precisely similar. Sundays, if they are in harbour, are kept, more or less, as a day of rest, and there is church to be attended during the forenoon, but it is a peculiar fact that

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Sunday is the one day in the week when things always seem to happen.

Nobody on board has very much time for amusement. At sea, being on watch, eating, and sleeping alternate with monotonous regularity, and when the weary vigils are over men are only too pleased to snatch a hasty meal and then to lie down and slumber, if the weather permits it. In the brief spells in harbour, the men amuse themselves and manage to keep cheery. Then the evenings are usually spent in song, and the band —they don't really know whether to call it a "string" or a "wind" band, for it consists of two banjoes, a mandoline, a concertina, two mouth-organs, and a couple of penny whistles— disports itself on deck. Somebody even talks about getting up a nigger minstrel troupe!

At sea the officers are kept very busy, for the First Lieutenant, Sub-Lieutenant, and Gunner keep three regular watches on the bridge—four hours on and eight off—and have their other jobs to do as well. The First Lieutenant is responsible for the cleanliness of the ship, discipline generally, the training of the gun's crews, and a hundred and one other things. The Sub looks out for the correction of the charts, while the Gunner has his torpedoes and ammunition. All strenuous tasks, but all done well.

The Engineer officer seems to spend most of his time in a suit of dirty overalls. He generally looks rather harassed, for the superintendence of the turbines and oil-fired boilers, the making good of minor defects, besides his responsibility for all the stores in the ship, is a difficult and trying business.

The skipper, be he Lieutenant Commander or Commander, is responsible for everything. In harbour he sleeps in the comfortable bunk in his

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cabin, and has his daily bath, and his meals in the wardroom, like a gentleman. At sea he is always on the bridge or in the chart-house immediately beneath it, and in this latter place he has his meals and snatches what sleep he can get on the cushioned locker. It is rather trying when the ship is rolling and a frolicsome breakfast kipper skips from its plate and leaves a greasy trail across a chart of the North Sea. The Sub, the custodian of the charts, gets distinctly annoyed on such occasions.

At sea, when he is not on the bridge, or eating or sleeping in the chart-house, the skipper generally reads something light and not about the war. But at any time of the day and night he may be called up, and when the ship is at sea he never takes off his clothes, and rarely washes or shaves. There is no time for it.

But still he is perfectly happy and loves the life, and so do all his men. They wouldn't be anywhere else for worlds. Their one real anxiety is the German High Sea Fleet. They all have a lurking suspicion at the back of their minds that it will not come out and fight, and with the Heligoland business as a taste of what it is like, they all long to emulate the deeds of their comrades in the Army.

War is war, and sometimes it is very horrible, but our sailormen are happy, all the same.

A SUNDAY AFTERNOON

It is two o'clock on Sunday afternoon, and, following the immemorial custom of the Navy, the armchairs and cushioned settees in the cruiser's smoking-room are occupied by four

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semi-somnolent officers. The Surgeon, commonly known as the "young Doc.," is a wily bird, and hurried over his lunch to secure the best caulking billet, so now, with his cap tilted over his eyes to keep out the glare of the electric light, and an unlit pipe drooping foolishly from his mouth, is blissfully slumbering in an armchair immediately in front of the stove. To his left, in a similar chair, sprawls the Lieutenant-Commander (G) with a lazy fox-terrier curled up in his lap. The officer is pretending to read a book, but his head nods suspiciously; his eyes are alternately opening and closing, and before long he too will be asleep. He deserves it, for he spent the greater portion of the night on deck.

Stretched out on one of the settees is the junior watchkeeper, a lieutenant who, from the facts that his height is six feet four and his surname is Little, rejoices in the nickname of "Shorty." He kept the middle watch last night, four hours spent on the bridge with the thermometer well down below freezing-point, a piercing wind, and occasional fierce, blinding squalls of snow and sleet searching out the joints in his harness. He also slumbers.

The fourth occupant is a two-striped A.P. (Assistant Paymaster), and he, having been beaten by a short head by the young Doc. in the race for the armchair by the fire, has resigned himself to a more frigid billet on a sofa on the opposite side of the little apartment. The warmth of the stove does not reach him, but he has managed to make himself tolerably comfortable with two cushions and a rug from his cabin. At present he is snoring melodiously in two keys, "like the fog signal of a ruddy lightship," as the disgusted Torpedo Lieutenant expressed it when

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he poked his nose inside the curtained doorway half an hour ago.

For the last four days the cruiser has been at sea. It has not been all jam, for gale has succeeded gale with monotonous regularity, while the heavy seas washing knee-deep over the low decks have made things distinctly unpleasant down below, where fresh air has been at a minimum. Sea boots, old clothes, and a variety of woollen garments have been the order of the day, and officers and men coming below after their watches on deck have had to thaw the frozen spray and sleet out of their hair and eyebrows. Meals, on account of the uncomfortable corkscrew motion of the ship, have been sparsely attended, and if you ask the Padré's marine servant he will tell you that his master has been living on slops in his cabin ever since the ship left harbour. But "His Reverence" is not a man of the sea. He is a Cambridge M.A., a hard-working, patriotic curate from a small parish in Surrey, who volunteered his services when the war started. All the more power to his elbow! He will certainly have some yarns to spin to his parishioners when he gets back.

But all that is over now, for at 11.30 a.m. the ship came into harbour and anchored. She will be there for forty-eight hours, if not more, and at daylight to-morrow a collier will come alongside and the ship's company will have the dismal task of taking in 1,000 tons of coal. But that is to-morrow, and sufficient for the day. . . .

Inside the smoking-room the "fug," as someone inelegantly puts it, could be cut with a knife. Every scuttle is shut; the stove, full to the top, blazes furiously; and the atmosphere is well charged with the warm scent of tobacco.

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On deck the gale rages furiously. The great battleships and cruisers in anchorage strain and tug at their cables, and anchor watches have been set lest any of them should drag their anchors. Overhead, the leaden-coloured clouds chase each other across the grey sky with lightning speed, while the steep seas, even though the fleet is lying in a land-locked harbour, are each crowned with their masses of yeasty foam as they go swishing past.

Boat work is distinctly exciting and nerve-wracking, even perilous at times, but a small midshipman, who sixteen months ago was still a cadet at Dartmouth, has been away in his picket boat for the mails. It has been a tough job, for the little steamboat rolled and wallowed incessantly and all but buried herself in the seas, but the youngster has piloted his small command back in safety, and even now the bloated mail-bags are being passed carefully out of her and carried up the cruiser's gangway.

The mail has arrived, and the mail to a sailorman is as a bowl of water to a thirsty dog.

* * * * * *

Twenty minutes later the Torpedo Lieutenant, on his way to his cabin with a packet of letters and a couple of parcels, looks into the smoking-room.

"Hey, you blokes!" he shouts, seeing that the occupants are still in the land of dreams. "Wake up! The mail's on board and in the wardroom! Phew!" he adds in mock disgust, sniffing the air and wrinkling his nose. "The frowst in here is something unholy. Open a scuttle, someone, for the Lord's sake!"

With this advice he disappears. His letters look interesting, and he is anxious to read them in privacy.

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The Lieutenant-Commander (G) opens his eyes and blinks; the young Doc., an engaged man, is already half-way through the door; the A.P. is slowly uncurling himself from his rug, while the junior watchkeeper sits up rubbing his eyes.

"Did I hear Torps say the mail had arrived?" he demands, yawning.

"You did, my young fellow," says the Lieutenant-Commander, unceremoniously bundling the fox-terrier to the floor and rising to his feet with some show of haste. "It's just about time I got a letter from my missus, too."

"Guns," as he is affectionately called, is very much married, and disappears through the door close on the heels of the Surgeon.

Inside the wardroom, one end of the long table running fore and aft, is piled high with heaps of letters, folded newspapers and illustrated papers, and dozens of soft, bulbous-looking parcels. The winter has come, and from the number of the latter it is quite evident that the recipients' friends and relations do not intend them to go cold.

Most of the officers are clustered round the table endeavouring to collect their belongings from the miscellaneous pile, while at one end the Commander with a packet of letters before him, is dealing them out.

"Pay!" he shouts, handing one across to the Fleet Paymaster. "P.M.O.! Guns! Guns! Great Scott, man! Is it your birthday? Myself," cramming a letter into his pocket. "Number One! Carling! Manners! Engineer-Commander! P.M.O. again! Pay! Padré! Guns once more! Little; looks like a dun, young man!" This to the junior watchkeeper. "Loxley! Soldier!" This to the Captain of Marines! "Padré, they must have made you a bishop!" handing his

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Reverence a long, crested, official-looking envelope. "Engineer-Commander!" and so on until his pile is exhausted.

Five minutes later most of the contents of the table have been sorted out; the floor is slowly becoming littered with discarded envelopes, newspaper wrappers, and the brown paper, packing, and string of hastily opened parcels; and each officer has retired to a chair and is busy giving a preliminary glance at his mail. It is noticeable that the married and engaged men attack the letters first, whereas the giddy young bachelors start by disembowelling their parcels; and presently Shorty Little, after surrounding himself and his chair with a veritable zareba of brown paper, mutters softly to himself.

"One tin of bullseyes," he remarks solemnly. "Twelve gramophone records. One muffler, with love from aunt someone, can't read the name, and a warm knitted waistcoat. Great jumpin' Jehoshaphat!" he ejaculates aloud an instant later, spreading the latter garment over his knee and eyeing it dubiously. "My pippin! What colours!"

The Commander, who happens to be sitting alongside him, looks up from his letter.

"Great Cæsar's ghost!" he exclaims. "Who the deuce sent you that thing?" He bends forward, takes the offending "thing" in his finger and thumb and eyes it fiercely. "Stripes! Purple and orange stripes! Well, I be damned! I say, Pay," he goes on, handing the garment across, "look what Aunt Martha has sent her little Willy! Isn't it the perishing limit?"

The Fleet Paymaster, humorously inclined, pretends to be blinded and falls back in his chair with a hand before his eyes, while the junior

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watchkeeper, not the least offended, is busy forcing the lid off his tin of sweets.

"Have a bullseye, sir?" he says facetiously, handing it across.

"The answer," replies the Commander with a laugh, "is in the negative; thanks very much all the same. Who sent 'em?"

"Flapper cousin. Rather fancies herself at makin' sweets, and I get a tin of these every month to keep me warm in the night watches. Don't eat 'em myself, but find 'em quite useful for giving away to the messengers. They all love me dearly. She's had rather a slip up with this lot, though," he adds judicially, peering inside the tin and poking the contents with his forefinger. "They're all stuck together. Certain you won't have one, sir?"

"Poor me, no," says the Commander. "By the way, what d'you propose doing with that offensive garment you've just received?"

"I don't quite know, sir," Little answers, eyeing the waistcoat. "It's rather a problem. If by any chance I ever get any leave, the giddy old trout who made it will expect to see me wearing it. But I can't," shaking his head. "Good Lord! Think of it!"

"If I were you," the other suggests, "I'd give it to my servant. It'll make him your friend for life."

"Not a bad idea," agrees Little, clutching it to his bosom and preparing to depart. "I think I will."

Now at the beginning of the war Shorty Little gutted his cabin. His full dress, plain clothes, books, pictures, and other relics of peace-time were sent ashore, partly because they might add to the conflagration if the ship was set on fire in

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action, but more particularly because Little himself was perfectly aware that he would receive no compensation for such things from the Admiralty if the ship was sunk and he himself was saved. But since that fatal August 4th, 1914, he had been given more than enough to make up for what he landed. Many of the things he has given away, but here is a list:

Eleven mufflers of various lengths and colours (quite useful), one second-hand leather motor-coat (also useful, but uncomfortable to swim in if anything happens to the ship), three vacuum bottles, various sizes (very useful indeed—two given away, one kept), one fountain pen (useful, but he already possessed a couple), one wrist-watch with radium figures (most useful), two sweaters (one useful—one too obviously second-hand, and presented to Private Bowles, his marine servant; received with much gratitude), fourteen and a half pairs of socks (useful; labels attached "To a hero at the front"), one large box home-made chocolate (probably excellent, but arrived in a coagulated mass; presented to one of the ship's boys), one tin biscuit-box, containing 100 Gold Flake cigarettes, one cake scented soap, one tin tooth-powder, one tooth-brush (sent by a juvenile female cousin who had heard that sailors liked cigarettes, and had few opportunities of washing. Little smokes a pipe and has his bath daily, so presents the consignment to Private Bowles, R.M.L.I.), one Kapok waistcoat to save Little's life if the ship sinks (an inch thick; very warm and useful; retained), one pneumatic ditto, to be blown up in the water (also useful; retained for summer wear, but temporarily lent to the Engineer-Commander, whose own is punctured), many gramophone records

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(useful ; presented to the men), a tin of home-made bullseyes (monthly), many parcels of time-expired newspapers and magazines (generally thrown overboard), books, playing cards, four Christmas puddings (used in the wardroom), wooden box containing one dozen pots of home-made jam (three burst badly ; handed over to wardroom messman ; jam omelette for dinner the same night), one trench periscope (sent to Shorty Little by mistake ; intended for a cousin of the same name in the Dardanelles — since despatched to its rightful owner), one knitted waistcoat, purple and orange (mentioned above ; presented to Private Bowles), a deluge of knitted gloves, wristlets, mittens, body-belts, Balaclava helmets, jerseys, stockings, etc. (all served out to different members of the ship's company).

Truly the Navy is well looked after.

* * * * * *

At twenty minutes past three a sleepy-looking marine servant comes into the wardroom to lay the table for the usual seven bell (3.30) tea.

" 'Strewth ! " he murmurs under his breath, gazing at the littered floor in dismay, for he knows full well that he will have to clear up the *débris*. " 'Ere's a fine pot mess. Thank the Lord they doesn't get a mail every day ! "

THE MINE-SWEEPERS

Six o'clock. A cold, gray morning, with a falling barometer, a rapidly freshening breeze, and a thin, cheerless drizzle. Altogether very uninviting weather, for overhead the sky is shrouded in sombre-looking cloud masses driving sedately in from seaward on the wings of the

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wind; while lower down, moving rapidly across the dull gray background, are the attenuated white wisps of scud and cirrus. The latter we prefer to call by their more familiar name of 'mares' tails'; and they, as the veriest tyro in weather lore knows, betoken wind, and plenty of it.

Inside the little east coast fishing harbour, with its twin gray stone breakwaters jutting out into the bay, everything is snug and peaceful enough. The water is only disturbed into minute corrugations as a more violent gust than usual hurtles in from seaward, but the vessels snugly moored inside do not feel it. They tug and strain at their hawsers as the blasts strike them; they grind softly at their fenders, but the gentle jarring movement gives no cause for real anxiety.

Outside the sheltered haven the sea is a wild gray-and-white expanse of leaping water. To a sailor it is not really rough, for the wind has not blown long enough from its present quarter to raise a really heavy sea. There is a 'lop,' as he would call it, and the short, steep undulations rise and fall perpendicularly with little or no forward motion; they leap about and topple over in confused hummocks and in no regular cadence; while their curling tops, spirited away by the fierce squalls coming down from seaward, go flying to leeward across the surface of the water in clouds of driving spray.

The harbour is very full. First come three homely-looking topsail schooners—fat, sturdy-looking craft with patched canvas, dingy paint-work, and no pretensions to comeliness. They are built for strictly utilitarian purpose; and presently, when the gangs of labourers arrive, they will be busy unloading their cargoes of north-country coal.

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Next comes an elderly coasting-steamer, a small, ungainly vessel with an absurd-looking funnel too far aft for beauty, and one stumpy yellow mast with numerous swinging derricks. Her mate, or whoever is responsible for her appearance, has an eye for colour, for her ancient hull has been newly painted black, with a vermilion waterline; while the superstructure round about the wheelhouse and engine-room fiddly is painted a rich burnt-sienna, with graining so that it may look like oak panelling. The funnel, brilliant carmine with a black top, is a gorgeous spectacle, and somehow the venerable old craft reminds us of an elderly but coquettish matron masquerading in girlish finery. But the man responsible for the steamer's appearance realises he has a reputation to keep up. The ship rejoices in the name of *Lord Kitchener*, and everybody knows who he is.

Several fishing-craft with rich-tanned sails lying at buoys, a lighter or two, and a couple of squat, powerful-looking steam-tugs are also present; while farther on, alongside the wharf, moored in pairs, are six small single-funnelled steamers flying the White Ensign. Their shape seems familiar, and a closer inspection reveals the fact that they are ordinary steam-trawlers masquerading as men-of-war. They are painted the usual steel-gray of the British Navy, and upon the bows of each is a number in large white figures. They are mine-sweepers, whose duty it is to keep the coastwise channels free of mines dropped by the enemy, and if we could go on board we should see the apparatus with which they do it. In peace-time they are simple fishing-craft, and can be seen in their dozens on the Dogger Bank. Now, during war, these small ships have been taken over by the Admiralty,

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and have become part and parcel of the Royal Navy. Their skippers have been promoted to warrant-officers of the Royal Naval Reserve; their deck-hands, trimmers, and greasers have likewise been enrolled in the R.N.R., and are subject to discipline; and, instead of seeking for fish, they now seek for mines.

The mine-sweeping trawlers—and there are scores of them—are divided into groups, each of which is commanded by a commissioned officer of the Royal Navy or Royal Naval Reserve; and their work, though at times it may be dull and uninteresting, is every whit as important as that of the battleships and cruisers whose silent pressure maintains our command of the sea and keeps our trade routes open. Those who live comfortably ashore have little idea of the hazardous nature of the task undertaken by our ex-fishermen. Steaming through a freshly-sown mine-field is rather like walking through a dense wood at midnight with no lantern, except that trees do not explode on impact; and since the war started many trawlers have been blown up, with serious loss of life.

The work generally starts at about daylight, when the vessels leave harbour and steam out to the area they are going to sweep clear of mines. The senior vessel of the group, commanded by a naval officer, goes on ahead to direct the operations, and the others, working in pairs abreast of each other, follow astern of her. Between the vessels of each pair is the sweep-wire, sunk to the necessary depth in the water by means of towed 'kites,' wooden arrangements acting on the same principle as the ordinary air-kites. This wire can be regulated to travel at any depth beneath the surface.

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The mines, moored to the bottom, may have been laid to float at any depth. They may be anything between twenty-five and eight feet under water, or even less, and the kites, with their connecting sweep-wire, are set at a mean depth to catch them all.

If mines are found, the sweep-wires either catches the moorings and tows mine and moorings along with it, or else breaks the mine adrift from its sinker and brings it to the surface. Sometimes the sweep-wire parts under the strain, but it is usually possible to tell when mines have been caught, and they are then dragged to one side of the channel and destroyed by rifle-fire. If the engines of destruction are broken adrift and brought to the surface, they are dealt with in the same way. If the bullets hit the detonators the mine generally explodes at once; but if, on the other hand, the buoyancy chamber is punctured and flooded, it goes to the bottom like a stone, and becomes innocuous. Either method of dealing with them is equally effective.

The mine-sweeping itself is risky work, for the trawlers themselves draw anything up to twelve feet of water, and may come into contact with mines laid at or above this depth. If a mine-sweeper is struck, and the resultant explosion occurs forward under the bows, she may be able to keep afloat, eventua'ly to be towed into harbour by one of her consorts. If the detonation takes place amidships or in the stern, however, it is unlikely that the ship will survive it, while the men in the engine and boiler room will probably perish with the vessel. How many mine-sweeping trawlers have been lost through striking mines since the beginning of the war it is inadvisable to say, but the loss of life has been heavy enough.

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Nothing seems to disturb the equanimity of the gallant North Sea fishermen who have enrolled themselves for this dangerous work. They are inured from their earliest boyhood to life at sea in small craft in all weathers. They are used to riding out the gales on the Dogger Bank, and to them it comes as nothing to go out mine-sweeping in weather which is nothing short of poisonous. Their hardihood stands them in good stead, for they may be out for three or four days at a stretch, with little or no opportunity for sleep; but even this is nothing to what they sometimes have to do as ordinary fishermen in peace-time, when they may not see the shore for three or four weeks at a time. One would imagine that the danger and peril of their life in war-time would have some effect on their nerves. Not a bit of it. They feel, and quite rightly, that it is no use pondering over what may happen. They just take things as they come.

During the early days of the war the writer met the skipper of a trawler whose vessel had just been blown up by a newly-laid German mine. She had sunk in less than two minutes, with a loss of about half-a-dozen men; and the skipper himself, who had been in the water for over half-an-hour, was badly shaken and cut about the head. No wonder, for the mine had exploded amidships, and had hurled him through the substantial roof of the wheelhouse.

"I suppose," I remarked, shortly after he had been rescued, "you'll be glad to get a spell ashore—what?"

"Spell!" he exclaimed rather testily. "Lor', no! I hope you'll give me another ship at once, and let it be something with a gun in it. I want

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to have a smack at the blighters who laid them darned things!"

I pity any enemy he gets hold of, for he is a thick-set, sturdy-looking man, with a chest like an ox, and meant what he said. His wish, moreover, was granted, for he is now in command of "something with a gun," though whether or not he has met any Germans I cannot say.

At 6.15 A.M. the trawlers in the harbour are making preparations for going to sea. The men come on deck in oilskins, smoking pipes, and eyeing the weather dubiously. It looks dirty, and the wind is freshening fast; but they know well enough that they will go out however hard it may blow. Presently the respective skippers appear from their tiny cabins and clamber up on the minute bridges of their little vessels. They too are clad in oilskins over a thick layer of inner garments; but it is noticeable that every man on board wears a cork lifebelt round his waist, or an inflated swimming-collar round his neck. They are fatalists perhaps, but there is no harm in taking a few simple precautions.

"Go on, No. 5!" comes a curt order through a megaphone from the senior officer's trawler.

The skipper of No. 5 waves his hand, pipes are put out, the men run to their stations in bow and stern, and presently the ends of the securing-hawsers fall into the water with a series of splashes.

"Half-speed ahead! Helm hard a-starboard!" the skipper orders the man in the wheelhouse.

The engine-room telegraph tinkles, the screw propeller begins to revolve in a wash of churned-up water, and soon, with her White Ensign fluttering bravely in the breeze, No. 5 is steaming straight for the opening between the breakwaters. She passes the gorgeous *Lord Kitchener* at a distance

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of barely twenty feet, and as she glides by a tousle-headed figure appears in the open door of the steamer's galley.

"'Ullo, mates!" he shouts derisively; "goin' fishin'?"

"Fishin', you lop-eared swab!" jocularly retorts one of the trawler's men. "Call yourself a sailor? Come out o' that galley o' yours and do a job o' work for a change! We're a man-o'-war, we are, protectin' the likes o' you, and don't you bloomin' well forget it, me son!"

The cook is not slow at repartee, and for some moments a rapid fire of nautical but perfectly harmless abuse passes from ship to ship. But at length the trawler is out of earshot, and is steaming through the narrow entrance. Her bows lift slightly as she makes her first curtsey to the open sea, and a whiff of wind-flung spray comes rattling over her high bows, to send the man on the fore-castle scurrying for shelter farther aft.

Ten minutes later the pioneer has been joined by the other units of her flotilla; and, moving along in single line, man-o'-war fashion, the whole six are soon punching their way out to sea towards the scene of their labours. The small gray ships, dingy and weather beaten, are in absolute keeping with the sombre gray of the sky and the gray-green expanse of sea. They seem eminently suitable for the work they have to do; but presently they have all disappeared from view behind a misty white rain-squall driving in from seaward.

The harbour, somehow, seems deserted without them, and not even the *Lord Kitchener's* brilliant colouring can quite make up for the aspect of emptiness caused by their absence. To-night, perhaps, when the dusk is falling, those six small

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gray ships will return with salt-encrusted funnels and a fearsome tale of many mines caught in their sweeps and destroyed. They may have a blank day, and catch no mines at all. If they are unlucky, some of them may never come back, and a laconic paragraph in the newspapers will state that H.M.S. *Trawler No.* — was blown up and sunk by a German mine in the North Sea, and that — men are missing. But this is an eventuality that the trawler's men themselves never consider. They are accustomed to taking risks, and they carry on their hazardous tasks with the same dogged perseverance and the same indomitable pluck that have ever been the prerogatives of British fishermen. Gallant fellows! No weather can deter them. In rain, hail, or snow, flat calm, blinding gale, or dense fog, they are always at sea doing their share in keeping the flag flying. It is no small share either. They have none of the excitement of battle. They have little to gain, except perhaps a medal at the end of the war; and we, who benefit by their labours, should be the first to acknowledge our indebtedness to the splendid fishermen who form the crews of His Majesty's mine-sweeping trawlers.

THE BAD HAT

I

"ORDINARY Seaman Charles Whitlock!" bawled the master-at-arms peremptorily. "Shun! Off cap!"

The youngster in question, an undersized, rather weakly looking youth, hurried forward to the defaulter's table. Behind it, gravely surveying the buff-coloured charge sheet, stood his

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captain, while the commander, the lieutenant in charge of Whitlock's division, and a couple of solemn-faced ship's corporals, one of them busily turning over the leaves of an enormous quarto volume—the Conduct Book—completed the little group on the quarter-deck.

"Ordinary Seaman Charles Whitlock," continued the master-at-arms, "did make use of insulting and insubordinate language to Petty Officer Henry Burton when ordered to tidy up his mess for the rounds."

The culprit, very ill at ease, shifted his feet nervously and fidgeted with the cap in his hand. The sight of his grave-faced commanding officer behind the table rather appalled him, and what could he, an ordinary seaman, say or do with two officers to bear witness against him and a third to act as his judge?

"What's this case?" asked the captain, looking up.

"Petty Officer Henry Burton!" called the master-at-arms.

The individual in question came forward.

"Make your report," said the commander in an undertone.

"At eight-forty-five yesterday evening, sir," he began, "I was going round the mess-deck to see it properly cleared up for the rounds. I noticed that this man's mess was all anyhow, with the supper not even cleared away; so, as he was cook of the mess, I sent for him to tidy it up." He hesitated.

The 'owner' * nodded.

"Well, sir, when this ordinary seaman comes, I asks him why his mess wasn't cleared up. He

* The captain of a man-of-war is sometimes known as 'the owner.'

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says it was cleared up, and when I says it wasn't he turns round and tells me to go to hell and mind my own bloomin' business."

The captain concealed a smile. "Did he say it quite so politely as that?" he asked.

"Hardly, sir. He used some horrible talk, but I can't rightly remember his exac' words." It was an untruth. Burton remembered every word; but he did not wish to increase the gravity of the offence.

"Humph!" grunted the skipper. "Was his manner disrespectful? Did he seem at all excited?"

"Yes sir."

"Right. What happened then?"

"Well, sir, I didn't wish to be hard on him, so I tells him he'd best be careful or else I'd take him on the quarter-deck before the officer of the watch. He calls me more names then, so I orders him to fall in on the quarter-deck, and goes away to report the case to the master-at-arms. That's all, sir."

The captain turned to the culprit. "You hear what Petty Officer Burton says. What have you to say to the charge?"

"I didn't mean no 'arm, sir," the ordinary seaman stammered.

"You didn't mean it! That's no excuse at all. You've been quite long enough in the service to realise that you must curb your temper. A petty officer, you should understand, is put in authority over you to uphold discipline. It's your duty to obey him and to treat him with respect. Don't you know that?"

"Petty Officer Burton 'as 'ad a down on me ever since I joined the ship, sir. 'E's always naggin' at me, an' tellin' me to do this an' that as if I wus a dorg!"

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"If you had any reason to imagine that you'd been unfairly treated you could always have asked to see me," observed the captain, seeing through the perennial excuse at once.—"Let me see his previous record." He turned to the ship's corporal with the Conduct Book.

"H'm!" he remarked, glancing down the well-filled page. "Not at all good; very bad, in fact. 'Absent from his boat,' 'Absent from his place of duty,' 'Skulking from divisions,' 'Asleep on the mess-deck during working hours,'" he read out. "You're always in trouble, by the look of it." He eyed the culprit critically.

The ordinary seaman could not stand the steady gaze of those steely blue eyes. "They orl seems to 'ave a down on me, sir," he mumbled indistinctly, hanging his head and reddening. "I don't seem to be able to do nothing right no 'ow."

The captain bit his lip. "How does he do his work, commander?" he asked.

The commander hesitated. He was a kind-hearted man, and hated to hit a man when he was down, but Whitlock certainly was a perpetual nuisance to him. "He was not very promising when he joined the ship, sir," he answered, "but he's improving. Oh yes, he's certainly improving."

The captain saw through the little deception at once. "And you, Travers," he said, turning to the lieutenant; "has he given you any trouble?"

"Not lately, sir."

The skipper nodded, and thought for a minute. "Look here, my man," he continued, dropping his voice and speaking more like a father to an erring son, "how long d'you think this sort of thing can go on? Don't you realise that we're at war, and that we all ought to do our level

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best for the country ? That doesn't mean getting into constant trouble, you know."

"I does my best, sir," mumbled the ordinary seaman.

The captain shook his head. "That's not true," he pointed out. "You don't try. You needn't think I like punishing men," he added, "and I'm glad to say I have had very few men to deal with since the war started. However, I cannot overlook your case. I have a very good mind to put you in cells*; but I'll give you one more chance. You shall have fourteen days number ten ; but if you come up before me again you'll go straight to cells, my lad—understand that ! "

"Fourteen days number ten ! " echoed the master-at-arms, mildly surprised at the captain's leniency. "On cap, 'bout turn, double march ! "

The little comedy was over, and the group of officers and men dispersed and went their several ways.

The plausible hypocrite Whitlock ambled forward with a broad grin on his face. He had bounced the 'old man' into believing that he was willing to reform.

Reform ? Not he ! Fourteen days number ten meant nothing to him. He had done so much of this particular brand of punishment that a fortnight more or less made little or no difference. It was merely pouring water on a duck's back. Stoppage of grog, turning out of his hammock half-an-hour before the rest of the men, extra work in his spare time, and musters at odd hours throughout the day did not worry him. They had become a mere matter of routine.

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* 'Cells' = solitary confinement on bread and water.

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But Whitlock was also a revengeful hypocrite; for as he slouched forward, he muttered sullenly under his breath. "If I 'as 'arf a chawnce," he remarked, *sotto voce*, "I'll bash that 'ere Burton —Mr. bloomin' Petty Orficer Burton—blarst him!" He said it very venomously, glanced round to see that nobody was looking, and then, very deliberately, spat on the deck. That was an offence in itself, but it showed his contempt, nevertheless.

Now Burton weighed perhaps twelve stone two, and had a chest like an ox, and a fist like a leg of mutton. Whitlock, puny and undersized, turned the scale at about nine stone three, and to 'bash' the burly petty officer would require some doing.

But the ordinary seaman, to do him justice, was no coward. He had pluck of a sort, and at the time he fully meant every word he said.

II

It so happened that the opportunity for the 'bashing' of Petty Officer Burton never came; for exactly three days later, at dawn, the *Clytia* found herself in sight of a three-funnelled cruiser, hull down, over the horizon. Her appearance was greeted with no small amount of excitement on the part of the British cruiser's ship's company, for the stranger, though she was fully fifteen miles distant, bore every resemblance to the *Prinz Friedrich*, one of the last German men-of-war operating on the British trade-routes in the South Atlantic, which the *Clytia* and her consorts had been sent to seek out and destroy.

The two ships were fairly evenly matched as regards armament. Both were 'protected

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cruisers,' built long before the days of Dreadnoughts, and while the German mounted twelve 5·9 and eight 3·4-inch guns, the *Clytia* carried eleven 6-inch and eight 3-inch. In the matter of speed, however, there was some disparity, for the *Prinz Friedrich* was popularly supposed to be capable of 21 knots. The British vessel, on her trials in 1898, had done 20·3, having actually been designed to do 19·5. But now in 1915, at the age of seventeen, she was no longer a chicken, and had reached the stage at which her engineer-commander doubted if he could induce her to do more than 18½ to 19. He had qualms as to whether her engines and boilers were capable of more.

The captain of the *Clytia*, high up on his bridge, looked anxiously at the strange cruiser through his glasses, and before long became quite certain in his mind, though he could not distinguish her ensign, that she was German. Orders had already been transmitted to the engine-room for full speed, and the poor old ship, palpitating like a jelly, was pounding along with dense volumes of smoke pouring from her two funnels. Word had been passed round that an enemy was in sight, and the stokers, feeling they were on their mettle, shovelled coal on to the blazing furnaces for all they were worth. The officers and men in the engine-room, too, had quite made up their minds to get 20 knots or to 'bust things up' in the process, and their efforts were successful. The revolutions of the elderly but carefully-nursed engines gradually increased—17·6 knots—18·5—19—20—20·1. At 20·1 she remained steady. It was her limit; nothing could drive her faster.

The captain put down his glasses with a smile.

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"I think," he remarked to the lieutenant (N.) at his side, "that we've gained on her."

The navigator was doubtful. "I'm not so sure, sir," he said, shaking his head.

"Pessimist!" laughed the skipper. "I know we have! She was hull down when we sighted her, and now I can see her upper deck. Still," he was forced to admit, "she may not be going full speed, and we've fully seven miles to gain before we get into range. If only"—— He paused.

"If only what, sir?"

"If this ship were a brand new twenty-five knotter instead of the ancient old bus she is. We're going something over twenty knots now, and that's a miracle; but that fellow over there" —he waved his hand toward the horizon—"can give us a clean pair of heels if he wants to." He spoke regretfully; for the *Clytia* had not fired a shot in anger since the commencement of the war—had not seen an enemy, in fact—and a 'scrap,' as they would call it, was the one thing in this world that her officers and men were longing for.

The thought which now beset the captain's mind was whether or not his enemy would turn and give battle. Things were so evenly matched that the probabilities were she would; but for the first three hours she still steamed away, with the *Clytia* pounding along after her. During this time the British vessel had managed to close in to within about twelve miles; but by 6.50 A.M. the foreigner had increased speed and was holding her own.

Ten minutes later the commander, bubbling over with suppressed excitement, came up on to the bridge to interview the captain. "We've

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cleared for action, sir," he said. "Shall I send the men to breakfast now?"

"You'd better," returned the other. "But if she does turn, they'll have to come up at once, breakfast or no breakfast."

The commander laughed. "I don't think they'll mind that, sir."

The ship's company were piped to their meal, but it is to be feared that few of them ate very much. Their excitement seemed to do away with all desire for food, for a quarter of an hour afterwards practically every soul in the ship, except the stokers, was smoking on the forecastle and gazing anxiously at the dim gray shape of the German cruiser on the horizon. Petty Officer Burton was there, and so was Whitlock.

"'Strewth!" grumbled the latter. "'E's runnin' away! Why cawn't 'e turn round an' give us a show?"

An able seaman close beside him laughed. "'Ark at 'im!" he exclaimed jocularly, eyeing the puny figure of the first speaker. "'Ark at our bloomin' warrior! Bloodthirsty little devil, ain't 'e?"

Whitlock seemed rather put out. "If it does come to a scrap, I bets I puts up as good a show as you, Mister bloomin' Nobby Clarke!" he retorted wrathfully. "We ain't all 'ulkin' great brutes six foot 'igh, thank Gawd! but I reckons we've orl got guts, an' that any one o' us is as good as three of those bally dagoes. S'welp me I do!"

"Orl right, my little cock-sparrer! Orl right! Don't get yer dander up. I didn't mean nothin' nasty." He patted him on the shoulder.

"Don't talk so wet, then," Whitlock returned. "You ain't the only man in this 'ere ship. I

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reckons——'Ullo ! " he broke off. " What's the racket ? "

A buzz of excited talk suddenly burst out from the crowd on the forecastle. The two speakers craned their necks to see what had caused it, and an instant later the ordinary seaman gave vent to a little whimper of delight. " 'Strewth ! " he murmured happily. " She's turning this way ! "

There was no doubt about it At first the strange cruiser had been showing her stern to the *Clytia*, but now she had turned to starboard until she presented a foreshortened view of her side. She was still circling, for presently she was broadside on, and then, finally, she was heading bows on for the British ship.

The subdued murmur from the men gave way to a deep hum of excitement and a brief outburst of cheering, but an instant later everything was interrupted by the brazen blare of a bugle.

" General quarters ! "

In ten seconds the forecastle was cleared and the men were hurrying to their stations for action. The barefooted guns' crews, stripping off all their superfluous clothing, clustered round their weapons. Little heaps of brass cartridge cases and piles of ominous-looking yellow and black projectiles were placed close to each gun, while down below in the magazines and shell-rooms the supply parties were waiting to whip up more ammunition as it was required. Hoses were spouting all over the decks to lessen the chances of fire. Everything was ready.

" All guns, load ! " came an order through the voice-pipes.

The projectiles were rammed home, with their cartridges behind them, and the heavy steel breech-blocks were slammed to.

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Whitlock, who formed one of the crew of the foremost 6-inch gun on the port side of the upper deck, began to feel anxious. The hostile cruiser was coming nearer and nearer, and it was the first time he had been in action. He felt his knees trembling ever so slightly, for the *Clytia's* 6-inch guns were in open shields on her upper deck, not behind armour. He experienced a sickly sensation in the pit of his stomach, and looked round curiously to see how the others were taking it.

His glance fell on Petty Officer Burton, the gunlayer. He had his eye glued to his telescopic sight, and was calmly keeping his weapon trained on the approaching enemy. The petty officer, too, was feeling nervous, but he did not show it. The ordinary seaman noticed his unruffled exterior, gulped twice, and felt better.

III

At the time the German turned toward the *Clytia* the two vessels were about twelve miles apart, the enemy being slightly on the port bow of the British cruiser. Both ships were steaming at about twenty knots, and in six minutes the range had decreased to fourteen thousand yards.

The suspense became intolerable as the *Clytia's* range-finder operator in the gun-control position monotonously droned out the distance of the enemy. "One three five nought nought," he chanted, without removing his face from the instrument. "Thirteen thousand"—"One two five nought nought."

The gunnery lieutenant was becoming impatient. It was a very clear day, and he was keeping his glasses focussed on the *Prinz Fried-*

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rich; and so close did she seem that he could even pick out the details of the flaunting ensigns at her mast-heads. The time hung heavily. Would they never arrive within the predetermined range for opening fire?

"Twelve thousand."

The gunnery lieutenant sighed with relief, passed a muffled order through a voice-pipe, and then stood up with his binoculars to his eyes.

There came a loud roar and a sheet of brilliant orange-coloured flame as one of the forecastle 6-inch guns went off. The cruiser trembled a little, and then, as a billowing cloud of brown cordite smoke went drifting slowly to leeward on the gentle breeze, the projectile, distinctly visible against the blue sky, could be seen sailing off into space like a meteorite. It soon disappeared, and presently a shimmering white column of spray leapt silently into the air some distance short and to the left of the enemy. It was a miss, but it gave the expert the information he wanted.

He passed another order to the gun. Another roar and a flash, and this time the shell pitched just short of the German, ricochetted over her, and finally plopped harmlessly into the sea beyond.

The enemy did not reply, but presently both ships altered course to the eastward until they were steering on converging courses with their broadside guns bearing on each other. The *Clytia* had found the range, and her weapons opened a slow and deliberate fire.

Now that he had something to do, Whitlock lost all his original fear, and found himself extracting the smoking brass cartridge cases each

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time his weapon went off as if he had been at the job all his life. Roar after roar broke out; concussion after concussion shook the cruiser; and flash after flash leapt out from her side as her guns spoke.

In the rifts between the semi-transparent clouds of brown cordite haze the ordinary seaman caught an occasional glimpse of the dull gray shape of the *Prinz Friedrich*. The two vessels were closing in fast, and the range was now about ten thousand yards—five miles; but even at this great distance the *Clytia* was finding her target. The hostile cruiser was all but hidden in spouting upheavals of spray as the projectiles drove home, but every now and then he saw the dull red flash and a cloud of gray-yellow smoke as a shell struck the ship herself and detonated.

He had plenty to do in extracting the spent cylinders as his gun fired; but the work was largely automatic, and he had ample time to think. He wondered vaguely to himself whether or not the enemy had opened fire. He could not see any flashes darting from her gray side, and so far the *Clytia* did not seem to have been struck. He had not very long to wait. Suddenly a great plume of spray sprang into the air about two hundred yards short of the ship. It was instantly followed by another, then another, and another. He held his breath, for he knew they were hostile shell falling short, and then, in the midst of the dull booming reports of the British guns, his ears were filled with a terrifying screeching, like a whistling express tearing its way through a railway station, shrill and very penetrating.

He ducked his head instinctively, but a moment later raised it again with a jerk. Of course! He

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remembered. The projectiles had fallen short, and though they might screech like ten thousand baffled, infuriated demons, they could do him no harm now. He grinned with relief.

The *Clytia's* guns were firing faster now; but with what effect, Whitlock could not see. Boom! boom! boom! boom! boom! they went in irregular volleys.

The air became full of the acrid, bitter taste of burning cordite as the smoke of the discharges drifted astern. The ordinary seaman glanced at the enemy again. He saw the spray fountains springing up all round her as before; but in the midst of them were the angry, sparkling flashes of her guns. A breathless pause, and then a great upheaval in the water barely thirty yards of the *Clytia*. Another and another, and all in practically the same spot.

The shells detonated as they struck, and almost at once Whitlock heard the humming whistle of their sharp-edged fragments as they drove through the air. By the time he heard them, however, they were probably past, for almost simultaneously with their whizzing he heard them clanging against the funnels and superstructure.

But one of them found a billet. There came a loud cry for stretcher-parties, and glancing round instinctively the ordinary seaman saw a figure lying on the deck barely ten feet away. The man's clothes had been badly torn, and he could see a horrible red gash in his side where a steel sliver had ripped the flesh. The blood, welling from the wound, was slowly dyeing the poor fellow's garments a vivid crimson and mingling with the water on the deck——

Whitlock felt very sick. He longed to run away

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and hide himself somewhere out of harm's way, but was suddenly brought back to his senses by a none too gentle prod in the back.

"Come on with that 'ruddy' cartridge!" some one shouted angrily. "What the 'ell are you waitin' for?"

He went back to his work automatically, feeling rather shaken. He gave another glance at the enemy, and saw that she had closed in. She was barely five thousand yards distant, but his heart jumped with relief when he noticed that her third funnel had disappeared. Volumes of black smoke and tongues of vivid red flame shot into the air from between the spot where the funnel had stood and the mainmast. She was on fire, then! So much the better! His spirits revived. He felt as if he wanted to cheer.

"Give 'em hell, lads!" he found himself shouting. "Give 'em hell!"

Suddenly there came an appalling crash from aft. Whitlock glanced round, and, in the midst of a sheet of orange flame and a cloud of grayish smoke, was vouchsafed a fleeting glimpse of one of the 6-inch guns slowly toppling over backwards. He noticed fragments of something flying through the air, and then the smoke drifted by in a cloud and he could see no more. He had no time to wait until it cleared, but in that brief second he had noticed that the *Clytia's* after funnel was pierced through and through like a gigantic nutmeg grater, and that the steel superstructure seemed fantastically mangled and twisted.

He extracted one more cartridge from his gun, but an instant later there was a frightful detonation and a brilliant purple flash quite close at hand. He felt as if he had been picked up in a gigantic hand and flung bodily to the deck. He felt him-

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self slithering along it—then came blackness, utter blackness.

He had been knocked senseless, and how long he lay there he never knew. Presently he came to, to feel a horrible burning pain in his left arm and side. He sat up and looked down at it, and then laughed stupidly. "'Strewth!" he murmured, very surprised. "I've bin wounded!"

The blood was dripping down his side on to his once white trousers. It hurt abominably, but not quite so much as he had expected. Then his glance wandered round the deck. The 6-inch gun—his gun—looked utterly foolish. He almost laughed at it, for the weapon had been stripped of its armoured shield, the sights and other excrescences seemed to have vanished, while the muzzle pointed up into the air at an absurd angle. One or two bodies lay on the deck close beside the wreck.

Whitlock suddenly experienced a sensation of heat, and looking round saw a pile of cartridges blazing like a bonfire within six feet of him. All round them lay lyddite shells in their canvas bags. "Gawd!" he muttered, gazing stupidly at the conflagration.

Some of the guns still seemed to be firing; he could hear their dull booming reports. One of the prone figures raised its head with a piteous groan. It was Petty Officer Burton, and he was badly wounded, but Whitlock had no time to attend to him.

His fuddled brain had resumed its control. "My Gawd!" he muttered again, licking his cracked lips. There was a touch of anxiety in his voice this time. He had every reason to invoke the name of his Creator, for the cordite charges were burning merrily in spite of the water

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on the decks, and the shells were perilously close to the fire.

If the heat caused them to explode the resulting detonation would fling every living soul in the vicinity into eternity. It would blow a gaping hole in the deck, and might even cause the ship to founder. He did not understand the gravity of the situation at the time; he only thought of saving life; and tottering to his feet, swaying like a drunken man, he cautiously approached the pile of blazing ammunition. The effort hurt him hideously, but he gritted his teeth and persevered; and hardly realising the awful risk he was taking, for the shell might explode at any instant, he reached the fire and seized a burning cartridge in his bare hand. He dropped it at once with a whimper of pain, for it was practically red-hot. It rolled across the deck with the gentle movement of the ship and lodged in the waterway near the ship's side.

He had intended to throw all the cartridges overboard; but that, since they were too hot to be touched with bare flesh, was obviously impossible. If, however, he could roll them all into the waterway it would do equally well, for there they could burn themselves out without danger. There were perhaps ten cartridges burning, and one by one he rolled them out of harm's way with his feet. How long it took him he never knew. It seemed an eternity before he had removed them all; but at last he had done it, and sat down on the deck, breathless and faint with pain. "Thank Gawd!" he muttered thankfully.

The guns had ceased firing, and there came the sound of cheering. He tried to cheer himself, but the effort was too much, and falling backwards to the deck he sank into utter oblivion.

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IV

THE evening was well advanced when he came to and found himself in one of the cots in the sick-bay. He knew it was the sick-bay, for he had been there before, but now the place was full of a sweet, penetrating odour—chloroform. He tried to look over the edge of his bed, but the movement brought a twinge of pain. Then he remembered, and lay back, blinking his tired eyes.

A couple of officers came to his bedside and looked down at him. One was the captain himself and the other was the staff-surgeon.

"Hah! You've come to, young fellow!" remarked the latter cheerily. That's good! You got a nasty smack. We had to cut away a——" he went on, whispering some technical details to the captain; "but he seems to be pulling through all right."

"How d'you feel, Whitlock?" asked the skipper with a smile.

"Pretty bad, sir," mumbled the ordinary seaman. "Can you tell me, sir"——He hesitated.

"Tell you what?"

"Did we sink her, sir?"

The captain smiled happily. "Yes, Whitlock, we did," he answered with a nod.

"Thank Gawd, sir!"

But the captain was talking again. "You did a very gallant thing, my man," he was saying; "a very gallant action!—You must get him fit again as soon as you can, doctor," he added, turning to the staff-surgeon. "The fellow's a hero. Mr. Parr, who was down in the battery, saw exactly what happened. Whitlock undoubtedly saved Petty Officer Burton's life, and the ship from very severe damage, if not from

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sinking. If those shells had exploded "—— He shrugged his shoulders expressively.

The ordinary seaman gasped with surprise. Him a hero! Could it be true? He must have been, for Leading Seaman Charles Whitlock, as he is now—he was an able seaman exactly a week—wears a silver medal with a blue, white, blue ribbon.

It is very rare in the navy, and goes by the name of the Conspicuous Gallantry Medal. The recipient sometimes thinks he did not deserve it; but Petty Officer Burton, his best friend, knows that he did.

THE DECOY

It was exactly three days before that the scurrying seaplane, streaming westward to her "mother ship" after her hazardous reconnoitring flight over the enemy's territorial waters, had reported one of the hostile battle-cruisers to be lying at anchor to the southward of the island of Norderland, with several light cruisers and destroyers in the inner anchorage. Of the remainder of the High Sea Fleet, that vaunted and much-advertised collection of vessels, neither she nor any of her aerial sisters scouting in other areas had sighted a trace.

Definite information as to the whereabouts of the enemy's main force was lacking, except perhaps at the Admiralty. It was nowhere in the North Sea, that was quite certain, for at stated intervals the British cruisers had swept right across its entire expanse to within ten miles of the hostile coast. Some people said that the opposing battleships were lying safe behind the

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guns and mines of Wilhelmshaven, waiting for the time when their submarine and destroyer attacks should have so reduced the numerical superiority of the British fleet as to make it worth while for the enemy to come out and fight on more or less equal terms. Others were of the opinion that the High Sea Fleet had returned to Kiel, where it was lying "doggo," as the saying is.

But the beauty of the whole situation was that the British main fleet had also vanished into space. It was "somewhere in the North Sea," if the newspapers were to be believed; but the North Sea is a very large place, and as a consequence the sallies of the German destroyers and submarines had met with no success so far as our battleships were concerned. It was a peculiar position, this species of bloodless war; for, though the small craft on either side had come into sanguinary contact on more than one occasion, the main fleets had never been within a hundred leagues of each other. But the British public had good reason to bless the silent pressure exerted by its navy. The North Sea might well have been called the "British Sea," certainly not the "German Ocean."

* * * * *

And so it came about that a certain British light cruiser, which we will call the *Emerald*, found herself early one morning within twelve miles of the defended island of Norderland. Rather a hazardous position perhaps, for Norderland was studded with 12-inch guns capable of dealing with a battleship, while the little 3,000-ton Britisher, built in "nought five," carried only twelve 4-inch quickfirers, and could not be relied upon to steam more than "twenty-one and an

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onion," as her own engineer lieutenant-commander expressed it.

The battle-cruiser lying somewhere just over the rim of the horizon, moreover, was a mastodon just eight times the *Emerald's* size. She could steam at least twenty-six knots, and was armed with ten great 11-inch and twelve 5·9-inch guns, besides ar assortment of smaller weapons. It was a case of David and Goliath all over again; but the friends of the former, in this particular instance, would not have given odds of 500 to 1 on his chances of success.

The *Emerald*, however, was acting under the direct and explicit orders of the Admiralty, and her commanding officer was the only person who knew what was really happening. The others were beginning to regard themselves and their ship rather in the light of a burnt-offering; but at the back of their minds there always lurked the idea that their vessel was only a pawn in some gigantic game of which they knew nothing, but which, at the same time, was being played for the benefit of anybody but themselves.

The dawn came in from the eastward with a rosy flush, and the paling sky overhead, streaked here and there with ragged wisps of rapidly moving mare's-tail clouds, became overshot with the gorgeous opalescent colouring of the sunrise. It was blowing fresh from the north-eastward, and the grim grey dreariness of the sea, too disturbed to reflect the glory of the sky, was flecked with white horses. But the short, steep little waves were comparatively harmless. They did not even cause the little cruiser to pitch and roll, and only brought a curse or two to the lips of the men stationed at the guns as an occasional whiff of icy wind-flung spray hurtled across the low-

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lying decks like a volley of small shot. "Christians, awake!" quoted the muffled-up figure of the lieutenant high up on the bridge. "Thank the Lord for the daylight!"

"Why thank the Lord?" asked the first lieutenant, who, by virtue of his office and the smallness of the ship, was also the gunnery officer. "There's not a perishin' thing in sight!" He seemed rather put out about it, and gazed round the gradually lightening horizon with disgust written on his face.

The navigator laughed. "Cheer up, Number One!" he remarked. "You ought to thank your lucky stars we didn't find ourselves under the guns of Norderland at daylight. I've been running on dead reckoning and, as we've been inside the twenty-fathom line the whole way across, the lead hasn't been any earthly use at all."

"I don't give a tinker's curse for Norderland!" retorted the other. "What I do want is a nice little cruiser or a destroyer; something, at any rate, to ease off the guns at. The men are all grumbling that they've hardly fired 'em since the war started! The worst of you perishin' pilots, though," he added half-seriously, "is that you never seem to know whereabouts the ship is. Now, if I were a navigator——"

"I do know where I am on this occasion, though," protested the officer responsible. "That's one thing in favour of reciprocating engines, you can navigate the ship on the revolutions. I'll lay a small bet with you if you like."

"About what?" demanded the first lieutenant suspiciously.

"That we pick up Norderland dead ahead

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within a quarter of an hour. Will you take me up? I'll give you two to one in half-crowns."

"I never bet before noon," replied Number One sanctimoniously, shaking his head. "What's that you've got in that thermos bottle?"

"Cocoa. Have some?"

"Bet yer life."

For some minutes there was silence while the first lieutenant drank the warm liquid. "Thanks, that's good!" he remarked at last, handing the cup across. "Where's the owner?"

"Down in the charthouse, looking at the chart."

"I wish he'd let us know what's happening. I can't help thinking there's something behind this show. Nobody in his sane senses would send a ship like this within twelve miles of— Hallo! here he is!" he added in a whisper, as the burly, greatcoated figure of the commander hove itself on to the bridge.

"Good morning, Number One," remarked the new-comer affably. "Are your guns all ready manned, *et cetera?*"

"Yes, sir," replied his subordinate.

"So much the better," said the commander. "I dare say you two would like to know what's going on, eh? I've not been able to tell you before; they wanted it kept dark." He had heard the first lieutenant's last remark to the navigator.

"We should, sir," they both answered at once.

The commander took them aside out of earshot, and talked rapidly for some minutes.

"D'you understand now why we're here?" he concluded with a smile.

"Perfectly, sir," answered the first lieutenant, grinning all over his face. "We're the bait, so to speak."

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"Yes, that's it," resumed his senior. "I am ordered to be within seven miles of Norderland by 4.30 this morning, and then we have to cruise about there at high speed for an hour, or until we're chased away. Lord help us, though, if there are any mines knocking about! We'd best be getting on," he added; "it's twelve minutes past four now. Shove her on at twenty knots, navigator."

The engine-room telegraphs tinkled merrily; the *Emerald* began to move through the water; and the first lieutenant, leaving the bridge, went round his beloved guns to satisfy himself that everything was correct.

The officers and men all looked happy, supremely happy, and the sight of the little piles of ominous-looking yellow lyddite projectiles in rear of each gun only whetted their appetites. They were in for it at last, after weeks of weary waiting; and as the little cruiser steamed off in the direction of the rising sun, with the White Ensigns fluttering from her mastheads and rigging, there was not a man on board who wished himself elsewhere.

"We ain't got much money," remarked the gunlayer of one of the midship guns, removing his eyes from the telescopic sight to superintend the ramming home of the yellow-painted projectile; "but we do see life!"

"Let's 'ope we're goin' to, Sam," the loading number observed, smacking the breech to behind the brass cartridge. "We've been waitin' long enuf, an' I reckons——"

"You reckons wot?" demanded the gunlayer.

"I reckons it's just abart time we 'ad a picture o' this 'ere ship in th' *Daily Mail*."

The gun's crew tittered.

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"'Strewth, I 'ope so!" ejaculated the gun-layer solemnly.

* * * * * *

The navigator's reckoning was not far out, for ten minutes later the rugged gray outline of Norderland appeared slowly out of the slight morning haze dead ahead. The island was about eight miles off; and, steaming in another mile, the *Emerald's* helm went over, and she sheered abruptly to port.

The hostile lookouts were on the alert, for at the same moment that the cruiser altered course a winking light began to dance in and out, in and out, somewhere near the summit. Its message could not be deciphered, but there was no mistaking its purport.

"They're asking us who the devil we are," muttered the commander, peering through his glasses. "The next item on the programme will be a shell."

He was perfectly correct; for, finding its signals unanswered, the searchlight ceased its flickering, and a moment or two later a sheet of orange flame blazed out from one of the forts. The island was fully fourteen thousand yards distant, but the size of the flash showed that a heavy gun had been fired.

Ten seconds—fifteen—thirty. Then there came the deep-throated rumble of the discharge. It was followed almost immediately by a gigantic spout of spray about one thousand yards short and well astern, and, with a whistling and a screeching like an express train tearing through a station, the giant projectile, clearly visible to the naked eye, ricochetted off the water and went sailing away through space, tumbling over and over in its flight like a badly kicked Rugby football.

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"What infernal things they look!" remarked the commander coolly. "I hope to heaven one of 'em doesn't hit us."

"They'll have to make pretty good shooting to get us at this range, sir," remarked the first lieutenant, who had returned to the bridge. "We're over fourteen thousand, and at that range the angle of descent is practically vertical."

"I dare say, Number One," the commander agreed. "But if they make any better shooting I shall draw off a little and steer a zigzag course. A single one of those would sink us outright if it hit us and burst. The last one didn't explode, I notice."

Another flash from the island. Another leaden-footed thirty seconds, and then the dull BOOM-M of the great gun, followed by the geyser of flung-up spray from its falling shell.

This time it came a good deal closer, barely two hundred yards away on the starboard beam, and, bursting on impact, the shower of knife-edged steel slivers emerged from the dun-coloured cloud of the detonation, and came whirring across the water like a drove of angry hornets. They came too close to be pleasant, far too close, for several fragments whizzed over the bridge; others rattled against the funnels, superstructure, and hull like a handful of pebbles flung against a corrugated-iron shed.

The detonation had taken place too far distant for the splinters to be really dangerous, but for most of the *Emeralds* it was a baptism of fire. They evinced no particular emotion, however; and now that the firing had once started and the dreadful anticipation was over, the guns' crews on deck merely shook themselves, looked anxiously at each other, and then gave vent to

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their bottled-up feelings in making remarks about the enemy's gunnery.

At this stage of the proceedings the little cruiser certainly had the luck on her side; for, though over ten heavy shells were hurled at her, she reached the end of her run without suffering any casualties. Then, when the dull gray shape of Norderland had all but disappeared in the morning mist and the guns had ceased their uproar, she turned on her heel to run the gauntlet again. Her commander was wise in his generation, for the ship zigzagged in her course as she went.

But for some reason the enemy's weapons did not reopen their fire. It may have been due to scarcity of ammunition, or perhaps the light cruiser offered too difficult or too unworthy a target, but at any rate the little ship was suffered to steam on for fully ten minutes without a round being discharged at her.

Then, quite suddenly, the mists lying on the water to the right of the island seemed to roll back, and the black rushing shapes of half a dozen hostile destroyers became clearly silhouetted against the gray pall behind. They were about six and a half miles distant—thirteen thousand yards—but the bones in their teeth (the white bow-waves) and the pall of black smoke streaming horizontally behind them showed that they were travelling at full speed. They were steaming, moreover, directly towards the *Emerald*.

The first lieutenant bent down with his lips hovering over the voice-pipes communicating with the guns. He made a rapid mental calculation. Say they were steaming at thirty knots, a mile in two minutes. Suppose they intended to close in to five thousand yards, and then to fire

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their torpedoes. It was quite possible, though risky for them, and it was on the cards that the *Emerald* might be torpedoed, and the first lieutenant had no intention of allowing them to close in to the decisive distance.

He passed an order through the voice-pipe, and the guns on deck slued round with their lean muzzles pointing well into the air.

The minutes crawled, and the voice of the range-finder operator droned monotonously ; but on and on came the black rushing shapes. Then he glanced at the commander, who caught his eye and nodded ; a muffled order went down the voice-pipe, and with the sharp smack of exploding cordite the first gun blazed out. It was followed in rapid succession by another, and then three more almost simultaneously. The ship quivered a little as her weapons spoke, and the gun's crew, with the joy of battle in their eyes, reloaded.

Æons of time seemed to pass before the projectiles drove home ; but at last a ragged cluster of shell fountains leapt silently into the air some little distance short of the attacking flotilla, now advancing in a wedge formation, with the leader at the apex.

Another order down the voice-pipe, another ripple of fire, and then amid the spray fountains the first lieutenant caught a hasty glimpse of a bright flash and a small cloud of yellow smoke. One shell, at any rate, had gone home. He smiled to himself and passed another order.

This time it was hell let loose, for the range had been found, and the guns were fired as fast as they could be loaded and their gunlayers could lay them.

The attackers became obliterated in a spouting upheaval which lasted for nearly a minute, and

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then again the fire slackened. But the attack had not been beaten off yet, for three black shapes still came on.

The guns reopened, and then came another pause.

The leader of the three had stopped, her fore-part a hideous shambles of twisted steel-work, and her deck swept clear of funnels, boats, masts, and guns. Down, down went her bows, and up came the stern until the rudders and propellers were clear of the water. She hung there for an instant, and then quietly settled down. Two of the others, one of them wreathed in a cloud of steam, floated motionless at impossible angles. Two more were limping shoreward as fast as their injuries would allow them. Only one appeared to be wholly undamaged.

"Shall we close in and finish 'em off, sir?" queried the first lieutenant with the mad lust of battle in his eyes. "I——"

His words were cut short by the sullen boom of a heavy gun and an upheaval of water close to the *Emerald's* stern. The heavy report came from the south-eastward, to which quarter nobody had been paying very much attention; but now, with a hurried glance in that direction, the commander put his lips to the voice-pipe leading to the conning-tower. "Hard a-port!" he ordered; for, looming out of the mist barely twelve thousand yards away, no great distance for an 11-inch gun, was the gray shape of a hostile battle-cruiser. She too was travelling at full speed, a speed which, if the reports were correct, had exceeded twenty-six knots on trial. The *Emerald* could only steam twenty-one and a fraction.

The first lieutenant looked at their giant enemy

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and then glanced at the commander to see how he was accepting the new situation. The latter looked perfectly calm and serene; and, profiting by his example, his subordinate grinned sheepishly; but still he could not help feeling rather nervous. He knew that the ship, to use his own expression, was only the bait, for it had been arranged that at dawn certain British submarines should be between her position and the island of Norderland.

The little light cruiser, apparently unsupported, was there for the purpose of drawing the hostile leviathan to sea in chase of her, while the submarines were to attack the battle-cruiser as she came out.

But submarines had been known to go astray, and suppose they had not reached their position? That deficiency of five knots, too, was rather appalling. How was the first lieutenant to know that his commanding officer had not told him quite all of what was happening, and that, just over the rim of the horizon to seaward, say twenty miles distant, lurked a supporting force of three British battle-cruisers? They had been placed there by the originator of the scheme, a man who was not in the habit of sacrificing his light cruisers on the altar of immolation without rhyme or reason.

The young officer on the *Emerald's* bridge was painfully aware that the loss of his ship would be considered as of very little importance so long as the hostile battle-cruiser was destroyed. He was perfectly willing to sacrifice himself and all he possessed for the sake of his country; but the cold-blooded anticipation of the deed was rather dreadful.

His thoughts were suddenly cut short by another

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report from the chasing vessel, and this time her projectile dropped perilously close astern. It burst, and once more the splinters came whizzing through the air. This time some of them found their billet, for a moment later there was a cry for stretcher-parties ; and, glancing aft, the first lieutenant saw several figures lying prone on the upper deck.

The battle-cruiser fired slowly, for her foremost turret alone would bear ; but she was approaching her quarry at the rate of about one hundred and sixty-six yards a minute, and her shooting was getting accurate.

Exactly how the projectile pitched the first lieutenant never quite knew ; but there suddenly came an appalling crash and a clatter from aft. He had a fleeting impression of a sheet of lurid yellowy-violet flame, a pall of thick gray smoke and black dust from a coal-bunker, and an upheaval of flying *débris*. The shell had apparently burst on striking the deck, for when the pall had cleared away the after-funnel had vanished. There was a great gaping orifice in the deck itself, while the wooden planking, torn and riven in all directions from its steel foundation underneath, burned with a sickly yellow flame. One gun had been wrenched from its seating and hurled overboard, and more figures lying in impossible contorted attitudes showed that the great projectile had done its work only too well.

The *Emerald's* speed slackened. Flames, sparks, and volumes of dense black smoke and white high-pressure steam hovered round the orifice where the funnel had once stood, and already the tongues of orange flame were licking round the woodwork in the vicinity.

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Then came a cry for fire-parties.

The first lieutenant waited no longer, but, scrambling down from the bridge, ran aft along the upper deck, shouting for men as he went. How they ever rigged the hose he never quite remembered; but after what seemed an interminable delay three jets of water were spouting on the blazing *débris*. Black figures, looking like demons capering round the crater of some spouting volcano, danced in and out of the horrible inferno of smoke, steam, and flame. The acrid fumes of the blazing wood, the bitter, sickly taste of the explosive which had wrought all the damage, and the all-pervading odour of steam and coal-dust assailed their eyes and nostrils; but they fought valiantly, pitting their puny strength against the might of the elements.

"Stick to it, men! Stick to it!" the first lieutenant found himself saying with monotonous regularity. He looked down and saw he was manipulating the branch-pipe of a fire-hose. He had seized it by instinct, without being fully conscious of his action; but his thoughts, somehow, seemed far away from the fire. "Stick to it!" It sounded so very trite and commonplace, rather as if he were encouraging a boat's crew at a regatta. He racked his brains to think of other words of encouragement, but could think of nothing.

Then came the screech and explosion of another falling shell. There was no crash this time; but a man near the officer suddenly spun round and fell to the deck. Then, somehow, his own right arm seemed suddenly to become paralysed and useless, for it dropped limply to his side. He paid no attention to it, and shifted the grasp of the hose to his left hand. Soon afterwards there

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was a deep reverberating B-O-O-M. The air trembled. It was certainly no gun. He heard volleys of cheers. The clouds of smoke and steam drifted to leeward on the breeze; but inch by inch, foot by foot, the fire was vanquished, until only a few spirals of flame danced in and out of the charred and blackened woodwork. A quivering haze rose from the scene of the conflagration, and, leaving his men with orders to keep their hose playing, the first lieutenant went forward to report. He glanced down at himself as he went, wondering at his scorched uniform. He looked at his left hand, blackened and blistered with the fire; and then, the excitement over, suddenly realised that his right arm was numb. He tried to lift it, but could not, and, feeling irritated, looked down at his right hand. It was bright crimson, and ominous-looking drops were slowly falling from his fingers to the deck.

"My God!" he muttered, aghast at the sight, "I must be wounded! Wounded! How beastly annoying!" The pain in his right shoulder became excruciating. He tried to open and shut his fingers, but without success.

He never remembered reaching the bridge; but the fact that he had a report to make had fixed itself in his mind, and he somehow found himself crawling up the steep ladder. "The fire's out, sir! The fire's out!" he repeated mechanically, going up to the commander. "I'm damned thirsty!" he added with a sickly smile. "Got anything"——He swayed ominously.

"Poor devil!" he heard someone say; "he's been hit in the shoulder." He did not realise that he himself was being referred to, but saw the navigator run forward to assist him. Then

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a gray mist swam before his eyes, and he collapsed quietly to the deck.

* * * * * *

About thirty hours later the *Emerald* steamed slowly into Sheerness harbour. She bore little resemblance to her former trim self, for her third funnel had vanished, while the afterpart of the waist was a battered conglomeration of twisted steel and charred, riven woodwork. But what did it matter? The British submarines had done their work; and the hostile battle-cruiser, torpedoed close to the after-magazine, lay quietly on the bottom in nineteen fathoms of water.

The gunlayer of the *Emerald's* port midship gun had his wish gratified, for three days later a photograph of the ship appeared in the *Daily Mail*. Below it appeared two rows of heads labelled "killed" and "wounded."

"'Strewth!" murmured the loading number, pointing to one of the reproductions, "that ain't 'arf like our old Sam!"

But poor Sam, the gunlayer, figured amongst the killed.

AN EYE FOR AN EYE

THE sub-lieutenant of H.M. Destroyer *Nestor* clattered noisily down the steel ladder and knocked softly on the lintel of the curtained doorway in front of him. He was rather pleased with himself, for the little ship had just returned to her base after spending the greater part of the last four days in the North Sea. The weather had not been pleasant, and he was very glad to be in harbour again, more particularly as the mail had just arrived on board, and he had in his

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pocket a bundle of thick letters which he was itching to read in the privacy of his cabin. They came from a certain young lady who usually addressed him as "My darling Billy." She was somebody else's sister.

There was no reply to his tapping, but he knew instinctively that there was someone inside. He knocked again, louder this time. "Captain, sir?" he queried.

"Well?" came the answer, in a voice which sounded unnaturally muffled and weary. "What is it? What d'you want?"

"I've come to show you those new charts you asked about, sir," said the sub, drawing the curtain aside and stepping into his commanding officer's cabin. "I have them here."

The lieutenant-commander made no signs of having heard. He was dressed exactly as he had left the bridge half-an-hour before, in sea-boots, an old coat, and a once white muffler. He sat at the small writing-table under the scuttle, with a newspaper spread out in front of him. His elbows rested on the table, and his head was pillowed on his hands. He did not shift his position, but his shoulders worked spasmodically.

Jephson, the sub-lieutenant, approached and stood at his senior's elbow. "I've brought those charts, sir," he began again. "I thought—Great Scott, sir!" he suddenly blurted out, his eyes opening wide with surprise; "whatever's the matter?"

The lieutenant-commander had raised his head and turned his face toward him. There was a look of absolute agony in the eyes, and one or two tell-tale splashes still showed on the news-sheet before him. He brushed them aside with an impatient gesture, but it was only too evident

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that he had been weeping. Crying! The skipper crying!

The sub could hardly believe his eyes. His first inclination was to leave the cabin, but then a feeling of sympathy prompted him to stay. The skipper was evidently in the deepest distress, and the youngster hated to see a fellow-creature in trouble without volunteering what consolation lay in his power to offer.

"I'm awfully sorry, sir," he said sympathetically, still unaware of what was causing the other's grief. "Can I do anything?"

"I'm afraid not, Jephson," answered the lieutenant-commander, his face working pathetically as he tried to control his feelings. "I've had an awful blow. My God!" he burst out fiercely; "if ever I get hold of one of them! If I do I'll ——Look at that!" He pointed to a column in the paper.

The sub-lieutenant looked.

"British liner torpedoed by German submarine," ran the conspicuous headlines. "Ship capsizes in five minutes. Many passengers drowned. Seventeen survivors."

Jephson stared at it, frowning. Then he suddenly remembered. "Good Lord, sir!" he stammered awkwardly; "is that the ship—er—was your wife——"

"My wife was coming home from Malta in her," muttered the other, his voice husky with emotion. "She is not among the saved. Good God! How it hurts!" It was a cry of poignant anguish. He dropped his head on his hands with a dry sob and stared into vacancy with unseeing eyes.

The sub crept quietly from the cabin, leaving the other to his silent grief. He could do nothing to alleviate it.

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The German submarine U69 had torpedoed the *City of Edinburgh*. All the survivors were quite confident about that. They had read her number. It was quite clear and unmistakable.

* * * * * *

Lieutenant-Commander Michael Dene was a changed man. He still did his duty efficiently, for it was not in him to do it otherwise, but the very heart and soul seemed to have been torn out of his existence. Before the tragedy he had been happy and contented, and his keen ambition to do well in his profession had spurred him on. Then the war had come, and in spite of its risks and hardships he had welcomed it, for was it not the very thing he had been preparing himself for ever since he had entered the service? Now there was nothing left to live for. It seemed as if he could never be happy again, for not even the affection for his work could make up for the love he had borne his wife. His wife was dead! Dead! At times he could hardly bring himself to realise that it was true.

At first he had seriously thought of making away with himself to escape the awful grief which numbed at his very soul, and on one occasion he sat silently in his cabin trying to make up his mind to rid himself of the world. He had the means of ending his existence ready to hand. A loaded pistol lay in one of the drawers of his writing-table, and he had only to point it at his head. A slight pressure on the trigger would do the rest. He wondered vaguely if he would feel much pain when the crash of the explosion came. Cowardly! Was it? He considered the point carefully. He had often heard that suicide was a coward's refuge. It seemed to him as if that was rather a mistaken idea, for even he

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miserable and lonely as he was, realised what a tremendous effort it would be. He could never screw up his courage sufficiently to do the deed. He put all thoughts of self-destruction aside. It was a cowardly way of escaping from pain and misery, he eventually came to the conclusion. No, suicide was not for him.

His work, automatic as it had become, served to some extent to keep his mind off his great loss; but in his odd hours of leisure, when his ship lay idle in harbour, his thoughts always reverted to the tragedy which had completely wrecked his life. It became an obsession; he could not rid himself of his thoughts. The gaiety and idle talk of his messmates jarred on his nerves; though, with due respect for his feelings, they hushed their voices in his presence. Dene could have had their sympathy for the asking; but he did not want it. He became morose and gloomy. They had something to live for, something to look forward to. He had nothing. Life was not worth living, for henceforth it would be so unutterably lonely. But he would live, for all that.

* * * * * *

Fog, grey, blinding fog, with hardly a breath of wind or a ripple on the water. Daylight had long since come, but the rising of the sun had only served to make the murk more impalpable and intense than ever. Dene himself would have preferred a gale of wind. Bad weather, unpleasant as it was, permitted one to see; but now he felt like a blind man in a desert.

The *Nestor*, with three other destroyers, had been despatched from her base forty-eight hours before on an errand which has no bearing on our story, and the four craft had been spread out ten miles apart the previous afternoon when the fog

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had come down as thick as a blanket. They had become separated, and had lost touch with each other, and had now been ordered by wireless telegraphy to make the best of their way home to their base. Dene, by dint of being particularly careful with the dead reckoning, and by constantly using his sounding machine, had a pretty shrewd idea of where his ship was. He felt no qualms from the navigational point of view, though the North Sea was full of mines and most of the lightships and buoys had been removed. But the very fact of being unable to see more than four hundred yards made him feel helpless and irritable; and now, at seven o'clock in the morning, with his nerves all on edge, he was leaning over the bridge-rail trying to pierce the wall of filmy vapour which bounded his narrow circle of vision.

"What was the last sounding, Jephson?" he asked.

"Seventeen fathoms, sir," answered the sub, whose morning watch it was.

The skipper went to the chart-table and looked at the printed sheet with the pencilled course of his ship laid off upon it.

"Humph!" he grunted. "What water did we get at six-fifty?"

"Nineteen and a-half, sir."

"That's all right," he muttered. "We ought to be shoaling gradually. It fits in all right. I put her about here." He placed his finger on the spot.

The sub acquiesced.

"In half an hour we'd better alter course to the northward," the skipper went on, busy with a pair of dividers. "We shall be——"

"Ship right ahead, sir!" came a sing-song

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but rather excited hail from the man on the lookout on the forecastle.

Both officers darted to the bridge-rail with one accord. Both peered anxiously through the murk, but at first they could see nothing. The seaman who had hailed was nearer to the water than they were, and must have caught a momentary glimpse of something under the fog-curtain.

Then, almost imperceptibly, a long, gray, horizontal shadow came looming up out of the pall. It was quite motionless, but was manifestly something tangible; and, acting instinctively, Dene rapped out an abrupt order to the man at the wheel.

"Hard a-starboard it is, sir!"

The destroyer's head began to pay off to the left. The gray smear became more and more distinct, until at last it slid slowly out of the mist and into broad daylight barely four hundred yards distant.

The lieutenant-commander could hardly restrain a gasp of astonishment. It was a submarine lying stopped on the surface. A submarine, but not a British craft. Her nationality was amply proclaimed by her light-gray, almost white, colouring, by her high, collier-like bows, and the peculiar shaped conning-tower. A white, black-crossed ensign hung limply from a short staff. She was a German, and though no distinguishing number could be seen, her enormous size showed she was a vessel of a very late type.

"My God!" Dene exclaimed, hardly able to realise the opportunity which fate had thrown in his way. "Open fire with the foremost gun! Steer straight for her, quartermaster!" He retained sufficient presence of mind to dash to the engine-room telegraphs and wrench them both over to "Full speed!"

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The submarine, having seen the destroyer at the same time as the *Nestor* had spotted her, was making every effort to escape. A flutter of disturbed water bubbled round her stern as her propellers revolved, while the men on deck started to tumble down their conning-tower hatch like so many bolting rabbits. She was evidently about to dive.

For the first time for a fortnight Dene chuckled grimly. He realised he held his enemy in the hollow of his hand. It would take her at least two minutes to dive, and the *Nestor's* stem would have crashed into her long before that. One touch from that knife-edge would either sink her outright or damage her so seriously that she would not be able to dive and escape.

He had no feelings of sympathy for his victims. He was merely very excited and rather happy —happy in the thought that he was about to destroy one of the instruments and some of the perpetrators of German frightfulness. To tell the truth, he gloated. He would still gloat when his ship's sharp stem drove deep into the shell of the submarine and sent her to the bottom like a stone. If any of her unfortunate crew did float after the collision, he felt as if he could gloat again when he saw their struggling figures in the water. He would see their awful staring eyes and the agony of fear in their faces ; but he would not make a move to help them. " Save, Englishmen ; save ! " they would cry in broken English as they floated past. This had been their piteous appeal when one of their destroyers had been sunk during the battle of the Bight of Heligoland on 28th August, 1914. On that occasion the *Nestor* and several of her consorts had stopped, lowered their boats, and had been

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the means of saving many German lives. But what had happened ? A hostile light cruiser had appeared on the scene, and had shelled them heavily while the boats were still away on their errand of mercy.

The Coronel incident, when Von Spee's victorious squadron steamed through the struggling survivors of the *Good Hope* and *Monmouth* after their ships had been sunk by the gunfire of the *Scharnhorst* and *Gneisenau ;* the *Falaba* and *Lusitania* affairs, when innocent non-combatants, some of them women, had been sent to their doom by a submarine ; and, above all, his own great tragedy, had hardened his heart. Mercy ? His enemies never exercised it, so what right had they to expect it from him ? If he did ram and sink this submarine, there would be no survivors ; he would take good care of that. A corpse or two to prove that he had done it, perhaps ; but *no survivors !* He chuckled grimly. Revenge would be very sweet.

Then suddenly came a sharp roar as the 4-inch gun on the forecastle went off. It was practically impossible to miss, and the shell, driving home on the low-lying hull some distance abaft the upstanding conning-tower, burst with a loud detonation, a brilliant sheet of ruddy flame, and a cloud of black smoke.

"Fire at the conning-tower !" somebody shouted.

Again the 4-inch gun barked, but this time the gunlayer was flurried and excited, for the projectile missed its target altogether, and burst harmlessly in the sea beyond.

The *Nestor's* men, hearing the first report, were rushing to their stations. The destroyer had been travelling at about twelve knots when the

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submarine was sighted; but now, with her turbines using every ounce of steam they would take, her speed was momentarily increasing. The submarine was now so close that the gun could not be depressed sufficiently to fire again. Two hundred and fifty yards, two hundred yards, one hundred yards.

"Starboard a little, coxswain!" Dene whispered, breathless with pent-up excitement. "Steady so!"

"Steady it is, sir!" answered the petty officer calmly, twirling his wheel. Æons of time seemed to pass before the crash came. In reality something under a minute went by between the time the submarine was first sighted and the actual collision; but to Dene, waiting on the bridge, it seemed an eternity.

On board the submarine only one man could be seen, and he was a young-looking, fair-haired officer standing on the conning-tower. He made no effort to go below, and the lieutenant-commander could even see the frightened expression in his eyes and hear his orders to the man at the steering-wheel in the interior of the craft below. Fifty yards, twenty-five yards.

The submarine's helm was suddenly put hard over to dodge the expected blow. She began to circle round; but her last despairing effort was too late. The *Nestor* was quicker on her helm than she, and the destroyer's coxswain, noticing the enemy's alteration of course, promptly moved his wheel ever so slightly to follow her round. Dene saw the officer look up at the destroyer. He evidently realised that his last manœuvre was useless, and that the collision was inevitable, for he shouted something to his men, and a sailor's head and shoulders appeared in the opening of

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the conning-tower. Then the hostile craft disappeared, shut out from view behind the *Nestor's* high bows.

Dene gripped the bridge-rail and braced himself for the shock of the collision. It came, a shivering jar which nearly stopped the destroyer dead, and hurled many of her men to the deck. She heeled over bodily. There came an awful grinding and wrenching of violently distorted metal, and then a series of sickening muffled bumps and crashes deep down below the water-line as she slid over her antagonist and forced her under. The blow had not cut the submarine in halves; but it had opened up a great hole in her double hull, through which the water was now pouring like a mill-sluice.

The lieutenant-commander leaned out over the end of the bridge and looked into the sea. He was vouchsafed a momentary glimpse of the gray bow of the stricken vessel standing out of the water at an angle of forty-five degrees. It was sinking gradually, scraping along the destroyer's side, and so close that he could have jumped upon it.

"Hard a-starboard! Full speed astern port!" he ordered, watching the remains swirling by. Whatever happened he must keep his stern, with the rudder and propellers, clear of the wreck.

The *Nestor* turned fast, and by the time her stern was level with the spot where the collision had taken place the blunt bow of her adversary had disappeared, sucked under the water as if by a gigantic magnet. All that remained was an ever-widening circle of thick, iridescent oil floating on the water and a commotion of gigantic air-bubbles, with, in the middle of it, three life-buoys, a few floating spars, a small collapsible boat bottom up, and the dark heads of three

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swimmers. All the rest of her men had gone to their doom in the riven hull of the vessel, now sinking quietly to its last resting-place in the still depths of the North Sea. Dene saw one of the survivors reach a life-buoy, clutch it, and then wave an arm to the British destroyer.

"By God!" he muttered; "I can't let the poor devils drown! Call away the whaler!" He forgot his previous thoughts of revenge. There was something so utterly un-British and unmanly in leaving drowning men to their fate that he could not resist the impulse to save them.

The *Nestor's* way was stopped, and the boat was lowered; and presently he had the satisfaction of seeing the three poor wretches dragged on board and rowed back to the ship. One of them was the officer in command.

Soon afterwards the destroyer's engineer-lieutenant, clad in dirty overalls and dripping with water, appeared on the bridge.

"Well," Dene queried anxiously, "what's the damage?"

"We're badly holed forward," said the other. "The foremost oil-fuel tanks are leaking, and most of the stuff's already gone overboard. Several plates and frames are smashed. We've made a lot of water forward, of course; but the collision bulkhead is intact, and seems to be holding."

"Thank the Lord! D'you think we can get back?"

"Certain of it, sir! We can keep the water abaft the bulkhead under with our ejectors. It'll mean a dockyard job to dish her up, of course; but so long as you go dead slow, and the weather holds fine, the collision bulkhead will stick it. By the way," he added, "do you know what submarine it was?"

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"No. Why?"

"I heard one of our seamen say it was U69," said the engineer, with a meaning glance at his commanding officer.

All the colour left Dene's face. "U69!" he ejaculated hoarsely, clutching the engineer by the arm in his anxiety. "Are you quite certain? For God's sake, man! are you quite sure?"

The engineer-lieutenant nodded. "The man I heard it from said one of the survivors had told him," he answered quietly, disengaging himself.

Dene turned abruptly on his heel, and for some seconds walked up and down the small bridge nervously clenching and unclenching his fists. He was thinking hard, trying to make up his mind what he should do. Could it really be true that the man who had torpedoed the *City of Edinburgh*, the man who had been responsible for the death of his wife, was now a prisoner in his power?

* * * * * *

"The number of the submarine you commanded," said Dene with ominous quietness, "was U69?"

The rescued German officer, very ill at ease, fidgeted as he sat on the cushioned locker in the *Nestor's* wardroom. He was clad in borrowed clothes belonging to the destroyer's first lieutenant; and, though he had been quite uninjured when his vessel was rammed, he looked abject and miserable. "You haf ask me zat before," he growled in English, glaring unpleasantly at his captor. "I answer nozing!"

"It doesn't matter in the least whether you answer or not," the Englishman replied with forced politeness. "I have already found out from the two men we picked up that it was U69."

The foreigner's expression changed. "*Ach!*"

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He laughed nervously, shrugging his shoulders. "Zey tell lies. Zey say zat to please you!" It was an obvious untruth—so utterly obvious that Dene was not deceived.

"I prefer to believe it," he observed, putting one hand into the pocket of his monkey-jacket.

The German shrugged his shoulders again.

"I believe it," the lieutenant-commander reiterated with an icy coldness in his voice. "Now, I will tell you a certain story. Do you happen to be a married man, by the way?"

"I am," nodded the other, looking up with curiosity in his eyes. "But vat ees zat to you?"

"Never mind. About a fortnight ago—sixteen days ago, to be quite accurate—U69 torpedoed and sunk a ship called the *City of Edinburgh*. It happened somewhere off the Scillies. Were you in command of the submarine at the time?" Dene looked at his prisoner with a frown on his face and a steely glitter in his eyes.

The foreigner would not look at him. "I do not answer," he replied, licking his lips.

"You refuse to answer?"

The German nodded.

"Very well. If you refuse to answer one way or the other, I shall take it for granted that you were in command of U69. Do you hear?"

"Eet ees all ze same to me vat you believe," retorted the other with another contemptuous shrug of his shoulders. "I do not care!"

"Very well, then. Since you will not clear yourself, I assume that you were responsible for sinking the *City of Edinburgh*. She was a passenger ship; I suppose you know," he added with horrible deliberation. "She had a lot of women on board. One of those women happened

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to be my wife! She was not saved!" He paused to allow his words to take effect.

The German changed colour and twisted his fingers nervously. He had some idea of what was to come next.

"Yes," Dene went on, raising his voice: "one of those women was my wife. You are a married man yourself, so perhaps you can understand what my feelings are. Do you?" he asked angrily, longing to strike his prisoner in the face, and only restraining himself with an effort.

"I say nozing" repeated the other, licking his lips and looking round with a hunted expression in his eyes.

"You say nothing!" Dene muttered between his clenched teeth. "You will not clear yourself?"

The German shook his head.

"Very well," the Englishman said slowly; "you are a murderer! Yes, a murderer! You understand what that means, eh? I see you do," he added, laughing grimly as his enemy quailed. "If I had my way I'd shoot you like a dog! Shoot you, do you understand?" He suddenly produced a small automatic pistol and balanced it carelessly in his hand.

His enemy's face blanched. He shrank back from the weapon with horror in his eyes. "You vill shoot me?" he gasped.

"Nothing would be easier," Dene answered with a contemptuous smile, gloating over his prisoner's terror. "If I had my way I should do it here. Nobody would be any the wiser. My ship has rammed and sunk your submarine. I have picked you up, and two of your men. It would be quite easy for me to say that there were only two survivors. Two survivors. Do you understand?"

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"You vill keel me?" ejaculated the other, starting up from his seat with genuine alarm written on his face. "You cannot do it!" He looked round nervously for some means of escape.

"You can't get away." The Englishman laughed grimly, toying ostentatiously with his pistol. "I can shoot you long before that. We are alone here—quite alone!"

The German clenched his fists and advanced threateningly.

"Stand back, you fool!" Dene exclaimed, levelling his weapon. "Stand back, I say, or I'll fire!"

The prisoner recoiled.

"I could shoot you!" the lieutenant-commander went on angrily. "I should like to do it, but I am not a cad. I don't kill unarmed people. Sit down and listen carefully to what I say. Sit down!" He still held the pistol steadily.

The German obeyed without a murmur.

"I'll tell you what I propose to do," Dene resumed. "I am going to give you a chance for your life. I have another pistol here, exactly like this one. It is loaded. I will give it to you, and then I shall go to the other side of the table and shall count one, two, three. At the word *three* we both open fire, and go on firing until all the six cartridges are fired. You may be killed, or I may, but I'm giving you an equal chance. Do you agree?"

The foreigner hesitated licking his dry lips.

"Be quick! Do you agree?"

"No; I vill not fight. I demand treatment of prisoner of var. Eet ees not fair zat you should propose——"

"Fair!" Dene interrupted, curling his lip.

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"Fair! I'm giving you an equal chance! Did you give the passengers of the *City of Edinburgh* a chance of saving their lives? No, you hound! You fired the torpedo before they could even lower their boats. Fair! Who are you to talk like this? You're a murderer! Yes, a murderer of innocent women!"

"I vill not fight!" the German repeated mechanically.

"Bah!" the lieutenant-commander retorted. "You're not worth killing! You're a coward!" He returned both pistols to his pockets.

The German seemed rather relieved for the expression of horror left his eyes. "I am not a coward, I——"

Dene laughed bitterly. "No coward!" he jeered. "Humph! I should have said you were! Nevertheless, I will not kill you. I will merely——"

He finished his sentence by springing at his enemy and striking him violently in the face with his fists. "Take that!" he exclaimed, his pent-up rage getting the better of him. "Take that! and that! Hit me back! Come on! Hit me back!"

The German made no effort to defend himself, but collapsed on the locker, trying to protect his face from the rain of blows.

Dene recovered himself and glowered at his cowering foe. "That is how I treat a coward!" he ejaculated breathlessly. "You will probably remember this day to the end of your life. When you do get back to Germany after the war, you can tell your wife that I spared you for her sake—that I spared you; I whose wife you murdered! I am a fool to do it, I know; a fool!"

He turned abruptly on his heel and left his

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stricken enemy to staunch the blood flowing from the wounds in his head.

* * * * * *

Early the next morning the *Nestor* with a collision-mat over her damaged bows, and two tugs lashed alongside, limped painfully into a certain dockyard port on the east coast. The prisoners were landed in charge of an armed escort, and half an hour later Dene received a telegram.

"Missed passage in the *City of Edinburgh*," it ran simply. "Have just arrived Plymouth in *Somali*. Am going straight to London.—Maud."

Dene gazed at it, unable to believe his eyes. His wife was still alive; his wife, who he thought was dead! A great wave of thankfulness surged through his heart. "Thank God!" he ejaculated feebly. "Thank God!"

He had two good reasons for thanking his Creator.

THE END

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